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RITUAL ART AND KNOWLEDGE:
Aesthetic Theory and
Zoroastrian Ritual
By Ron G. Williams and
James W. Boyd

RITUAL ART AND KNOWLEDGE

Aesthetic Theory and Zoroastrian Ritual

RON G. WILLIAMS
and
JAMES W. BOYD

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To our parents
RUFIN AND MARDELLE BOYD
GUY AND HANNAH WILLIAMS
with affection and gratitude

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FOREWORD

The conviction that underlies this book by Professors Williams and Boyd can be simply stated: rituals are to be taken seriously and their religious significance is a fruitful area of scholarly exploration. As a Zoroastrian priest, I wholeheartedly concur with this emphasis and encourage the study of ritual by scholars in all relevant disciplines.

The strength of the present work is that though it is highly theoretical in many respects, it is based on an intimate knowledge of the ritual practices and beliefs of my tradition. Professor Boyd has worked with me for many years and has endeavored to learn in detail the precise actions and meanings of Zoroastrian rituals, including our daily high liturgy, the Yasna, and the frequently performed ceremony of blessing, the Afrinagan. Professor Williams, as a philosopher of art, has worked with Boyd to help formulate ways of interpreting to non-Zoroastrians the significance of our rituals from an aesthetic point of view. Together, they have produced this study, which highlights not only the beauty of the rituals but also the manner in which they help bring about a life of righteousness.

It is through scholarly studies such as this that my tradition will be better understood by those outside it. Equally important, however, is the contribution this book makes to theories of ritual. Topics discussed in this book will advance scholarly understanding of the significance of ritual in all religious communities.

Dastur Firoze M. Kotwal
Bombay, 1991

SERIES EDITOR'S PREFACE

The study of ritual processes is a venerable tradition in comparative religion, particularly its anthropological branches. Ritualized human behavior is by no means limited to religion, for it covers such things as social relations, private habits, institutional customs, and political action. Something of the range of ritual—religious and secular—is treated in novel and suggestive ways in an earlier book in this series, *Ritual Criticism: Case Studies in Its Practice, Essays on Its Theory* (1990), by Ronald L. Grimes. A second study of ritual in this series, Henry Pernet's *Ritual Masks: Deceptions and Revelations* (1992), provides a critical survey of the-ories of masking and suggests new departures in this intriguing area. Grimes argues persuasively for a critical approach to ritual, viewing it as no less a cultural activity than music, drama, and literature. Pernet demystifies when he does not refute much previous theorizing about ritual masks and thus helps uncover something of the range and variety of the phenomenon in Africa, Oceania, and the Americas.

In *Ritual Art and Knowledge: Aesthetic Theory and Zoroastrian Ritual*, Ron G. Williams and James W. Boyd also break new ground in ritual studies by combining aesthetic theory with history of religions in achieving a fresh approach to some old questions, such as whether ritual possesses any intrinsic meaning, whether it can endure without change, and what its special quality is in relation to doctrine. By means of a model that views ritual space in three different ways—physical, semantic, and virtual—the authors try to understand how the ancient and—according to Zoroastrian tradition—unchanging Yasna ritual continues nevertheless to provide its performers with new, transforming knowledge. In their sophisticated and subtle argument, art and ritual are discussed together by means of what the authors call an "overarching meta-language" which combines the three types of space mentioned above with special understandings of metaphor, horizon, and complex masterpiece. The

authors demonstrate that the Yasna ritual is a sort of masterpiece, and, like masterpieces of painting, sculpture, and music, continues to provide insights and understandings over great periods of time. Yet they do not reduce the high liturgy of the Yasna to a mere art work, because they see its profound salvific character, which art works per se do not possess. Further, Williams and Boyd show their awareness of the limits of ritual analysis and the dangers of overinterpretation by always subordinating their own theoretical tendencies to the teaching and example of their main informant, the Zoroastrian priest Dastur Firoze M. Kotwal, without whose cooperation and guidance this uniquely valuable project could not have been accomplished.

Frederick Mathewson Denny

PREFACE

The present volume is an interpretive study of ritual activity. It is the result of a sustained conversation between the two authors, one trained in the history of religions with a specialty in Zoroastrianism, the other schooled in linguistic philosophy and the philosophy of art. Neither of us knew what surprises awaited us when we began our dialogue, since it not only brought religious studies and aesthetics into conversation but required combining documentary field work with philosophical speculation. Now that we look back over our writing, we can say that the subject has afforded the authors, in the words of John Austin, "what philosophy is so often thought, and made, barren of—the fun of discovery, the pleasures of cooperation, and the satisfaction of reaching agreement" (1961:123). Others must decide the value of our work, but we are certain we have arrived at an interpretive perspective on ritual which neither of us could have developed alone.

Our discussion is primarily one of philosophical reflection on ritual action, based on documentary description of certain Zoroastrian rituals.¹ It reflects our comparative interests in the history of religions, art, philosophy, and aesthetics, as we seek better to understand the nature of ritual activity and its role in our own time and place.² This work also reveals our interest in comprehending the ancient Persian tradition, particularly as it is presently embodied in a Zoroastrian priest of exemplary

1. Those with specific interests in the Zoroastrian tradition, or in the detailed documentation of ritual activity, may wish to turn first to the appendixes, which contain straightforward descriptions of the two rituals on which we are focusing—the Zoroastrian Yasna and Afrinagan ceremonies. Such readers can then consult the earlier portions of the book to find a philosophical discussion of the aesthetic structures and functions of these ancient rites.

2. Tom F. Driver (1991) and Robert Bly (1990) contend that we suffer presently from a lack of appropriate rituals. See also Turner (1982) for the claim that contemporary rituals are quite different from their traditional counterparts, that they tend to be, for example, "liminoid" rather than liminal.

character and knowledge, Dastur (High Priest) Firze M. Kotwal. The present essays are rather small steps in those directions, for, of course, selected aspects of both the ancient Persian civilization and our contemporary Western society can be grasped only partially and with difficulty.

Early versions of parts one and two were read, respectively, at the conference of the Council for World Religions, Harrison Hot Springs, B.C., Canada, 1987, and at the K. R. Cama Oriental Institution conference in Bombay, India, 1988. The editors of the *Journal of Ritual Studies* have kindly permitted the reprinting of the essay in part one which originally appeared as "Ritual Spaces: An Application of Aesthetic Theory to Zoroastrian Ritual" (1989).

Funding for documenting the Zoroastrian Yasna and Atrivagan rituals was provided by the American Philosophical Society. Other general expenses were covered by the Professional Development Fund of the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences at Colorado State University.

For the reader wishing to view the Zoroastrian ceremonies described in this book, videotapes of the Yasna and Atrivagan rituals, produced and edited by the authors, are available at cost from the Office of Instructional Services, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO, 80523.

We are grateful to Professors Donald Crosby, William Darow, Willard Eddy, Philip Turetzky, and Joachim Viers for providing helpful comments both substantive and editorial. We thank Martha Lynne Kesel for the clear and accurate drawings of the rituals and Steve Miles for his thoughtful compilation of the index. Finally, we wish to acknowledge our gratitude to Dastur Firze M. Kotwal, High Priest of the H. B. Wadia Atash Bahram, Bombay, India, for his untiring dedication to teaching his tradition to us and for writing the foreword to this book. Dastur Kotwal is an acknowledged authority on Zoroastrian rituals. Currently he is the leading spokesman in India for the orthodox Zoroastrian community.

Nearly twenty years ago, one of the authors, James Boyd, was working in Bombay with Dastur Kotwal. After they had spent six months translating and discussing a Zoroastrian catechism, Dastur Kotwal felt it was time to introduce Boyd to "the heart of the Zoroastrian tradition." The Dastur led him into the

ritual practice area of the Zoroastrian seminary, where he asked a young priest-in-training to light a fire in one of the liturgical fire vases. The two men sat staring at the bright flames for about half an hour, when the Dastur turned and said: "Now hasn't the world changed?" Boyd was perplexed; he had studied Zoroastrian theology, but had not yet learned how to see the reality of a ritual fire. This book is a first step toward grasping the significance of that moment; it is an attempt to begin to understand how "the world had changed" for that deeply religious, admirable priest.

INTRODUCTION

Ritual is ubiquitous. Like art, it appears to be one of the conditions of our humanity.¹ Yet the nature and functions of ritual, like those of art, remain mysterious. The fact that ritual is vital and significant, but incompletely understood, guarantees that it will continue to be a subject for inquiry and debate among both scholars and practitioners.

There is a peculiar poignancy to our position in history: though ritualized activity is everywhere in evidence, traditional societies, often defined by their concern to maintain unchanging religious and social rituals, seem to be disappearing at the very moment when they are the subject of much interest. We may wonder if we are not catching a glimpse of something vast and wondrous—a set of unique human possibilities—just as it vanishes. It is in this context that the questions addressed in subsequent chapters, questions about the mystery of ritual power and about the type of knowledge gained via ritual repetition, are to be understood.

Our research began with extensive field work by one of the authors, including conversations and catechetical studies with a Zoroastrian high priest, detailed field notes recording observations of Zoroastrian rituals, and videotape documentation of the two ceremonies discussed in this book. These data provided the pre-theoretic materials for the study of ritual and the Zoroastrian tradition, and later served as the means for testing the appropriateness of our interpretive categories. Our collaboration brought together the field-work data with aesthetic theory. We began by studying the videotapes of the rituals, endeavoring to remain attentive to the ritual actions themselves and to their Zoroastrian interpretations. We were convinced that these gestural images could fruitfully be looked

1. "In order to correctly define art, it is necessary . . . to consider it as one of the conditions of human life" (Tolstoy, 1896, 1960, 49).

agistic nature of the ritual arts, in addition to their meanings, allows us to characterize ritual powers while emphasizing those features which lie outside the realm of concept, proposition, and reference. The complex interaction of these elements at least partially determines ritual's unique and irreplaceable status. These claims are made with primary reference to the Zoroastrian high liturgy, the Yasna, a central "inner" ceremony performed in the inner recesses of the fire temple before a restricted audience. Our knowledge of this service and its significance for orthodox Zoroastrians is the result of the teaching of Dastur Firoze M. Kotwal, High Priest (Dastur) of the Wadia Ash Bahram in Bombay, India. Because we are using this high liturgy as an example of our general theses, the initial presentation of it is largely given in terms of the interpretive categories we are developing.

Part two takes up a question arising in the first essay: does religious ritual have a *noetic* function, and if so, is ritual a *sui generis* mode for the discovery and expression of knowledge new to the tradition? In answering "yes" to both these questions, we are in agreement with an earlier essay on the knowledge-gaining function of ritual by Theodore Jennings. But in most other respects, our analysis differs from his. The result is a characterization of two opposing stances toward ritual which together, we believe, define the field in which ritual knowledge is generated. This shifts the discussion from a study of (Zoroastrian) ritual in general to the practitioner's stance toward his ritual practice.

The primary point at issue between these two stances is the role of ritual repetition, a subject now gaining wide attention in the discipline of ritual studies. The question we seek to answer is how it is possible for more or less unchanging rituals to be instrumental in the generation of knowledge. We account for ritual's noetic function by analyzing the detailed interplay of the various art forms within ritual performance. In addition to the aesthetic categories developed in part one, the discussion in part two relies on concepts drawn from recent theories of metaphor. The Zoroastrian ritual to which these concepts are applied is the "outer," public ceremony, the Afrinagan, performed at varied times and places before a wider audience. We have selected this ritual as our example because it is one of the most commonly repeated outer rituals in the Zoroastrian community.

at through an aesthetic lens, applying to them various insights, categories, and theories from the philosophy of art. Chapter I presents a general elaboration of this claim.

Consequently, for the purposes of our discussion, we viewed ritual as if it were a kind of artwork which, like opera, film, or ancient drama, combines many of the arts into an internally related whole. We take neither art nor ritual to be a species of the other, but it is obvious that the techniques and conventions of the arts play a significant role in ritual performance.² Thus, we began investigating the nature of, and interconnections among, the dramatic, visual, gestural, musical, and literary dimensions of ritual, employing those aesthetic categories which seemed promising.

One result is that to the extent that rituals are akin to art, they share art's independent status. The novel, for example, does what only the novel can do, and it cannot be reduced to, or replaced by, historical, philosophical, psychological, or sociological expressions.³ Likewise, ritual is *sui generis*, an irreplaceable mode of expression not reducible to other forms of religious communication such as the pronouncements of sacred texts and their theological interpretations.⁴

To begin to understand the special powers of ritual, we have analyzed each of the art forms employed by the ritual as comprising physical, imagistic, and symbolic aspects. Part one is a detailed working-out of this interpretation. Put briefly, we portray the ritual/artwork as first a set of *physical* objects and events. Secondly, it is *presentational*: it appears in certain ways, as illusion or hyper-reality. Lastly, it has significance: it refers, expresses, or models; it is *representational*. Highlighting the physical and im-

2. In the contemporary West, the arts are now viewed as autonomous and thus separate from religion. So it would be particularly misleading to take ritual to be one among the arts, or art to be the handmaiden of ritual. However, rather than always repeating that it is as if rituals are artworks or that ritual is *akin* to art, we sometimes say simply that ritual is art.

3. Cf. Kundera: "In its own way, through its own logic, the novel discovered the various dimensions of existence one by one. . . . I understand and share Hermann Broch's insistence in repeating: 'The sole *raison d'être* of a novel is to discover what only the novel can discover. A novel that does not discover a hitherto unknown segment of existence is immoral. Knowledge is the novel's only morality' (1986:5-6). The remainder of Kundera's essay develops these claims further. 4. We are concentrating on art-like features of ritual and have not addressed the question how ritual's *sui generis* status differs from that of the arts.

AESTHETICS AND RITUAL STUDIES: AN OVERVIEW

We begin by exploring the relevance of aesthetic theory to several questions currently being addressed in ritual studies. At its most general, our claim is that those who study ritual should make fuller use than has been made so far of the literature in philosophy of art.¹ To a quite striking degree, issues that are central to the illuminating explication of artworks are found to be applicable to ritual interpretation as well. The following comparisons illustrate the considerable overlap between the concerns of philosophers of art and those engaged in ritual studies.

A. ART AND RITUAL AS INSTRUMENT

Many theories of art can be classed under the general heading of *instrumentalism* because they portray art as a *means* to some end which lies outside of the realm of aesthetics proper. Albert Camus, for example, calls upon art to be an "instrument of liberation" (1958; 1961:254). Some art historians speculate that art was originally taken to be magically efficacious, and most religious traditions insist on art serving religious ends. Tolstoy claimed that good art expresses right religious feeling and that it unites us by expressing "feelings flowing from the perception of our sonship to God" (1896; 1960:150). Others praise artworks for making powerful "ethical statements" or condemn them as propagandistic.

There are also those critical of instrumentalism who claim that all such theories would demote art to a mere means, lacking its own intrinsic value and therefore replaceable in principle by anything equally efficacious. In the light of this challenge, the task is to reconcile art's evident connections to our ethical,

and hence an excellent candidate for elucidating the noetic function of ritual repetition. Like our presentation of the Yasna in part one, the initial discussion of the Atrnagan is placed within our interpretive framework.

Methodological issues embedded in our approach are addressed in chapter II. The risks involved in the shift from ritual act to interpretive theory are acknowledged, as are the general limits of theory in ritual studies. What we seek is an interpretation not prone to reductionism and continually mindful that nothing replaces the ritual act itself.

In order to emphasize this last point, and to counterbalance our theory-laden treatment of the Zoroastrian Yasna and Atrnagan ceremonies, we offer a more straightforward account of both these rituals in the appendices. These relatively unadorned descriptions of the two rituals highlight the general features of each and return them, so to speak, to their traditional religious setting. Also included is a short glossary of relevant Avestan and Pahlavi words and phrases.

1. Though the artistic aspects of ritual—such as dance, drama, chant, costume, and music—have been widely documented and described from the perspectives of art history and dramaturgy, for example, this chapter advocates employing theoretical categories from contemporary philosophy of art.

religious, and political lives with art's equally evident intrinsic value as an end in itself, an activity which must not be "sacrificed for an end that is alien to art" (Canus 1958:262).²

Connections between these ideas and ritual theory are, of course, close at hand. Typically, rituals are claimed by their practitioners and by those who theorize about them to be instrumental in one way or another. They are said to be magically productive, therapeutic, transformative, empowering, or otherwise religiously, ethically, or socially efficacious. Victor Turner, for example, argues that ritual is a generator of new ideas, images, and practices, and that liminal rites introduce new behaviors and undermine established systems. In short, "ritual is transformative" (1967:95).³ Yet, at the same time, as Turner would agree and the subsequent discussion will indicate, rituals are intrinsically valuable and do what they do in ways irreplaceable.

B. ART AND RITUAL AS LANGUAGE

The overarching aesthetic theory in our time is that the arts, even paintings or vases, provide us with languages or language-like structures.⁴ Consequently, the arts display the powers possessed by language—to express, to represent, and to furnish means for action. They can provide us with sophisticated and many-leveled models of reality. The major types of aesthetic theory—instrumentalism, expressionism, representationalism, and formalism—are directly related to these linguistic powers. Put simply, artworks are viewed as objects that refer; they are maps rather than additions to the *territory*.⁵ This suggests two basic kinds of questions. (1) If artworks are maps, what are their special linguistic features, and how do they do what they do? (2) To

2. For an attempt to reconcile art's religious mission with its intrinsic value, see Ray 1974:201. Traditional aesthetic theory in India held that religion and art were co-equal "twins," born from the same source, the innate human desire to "participate in the one essence of being." This "twin theory" both connects art essentially to religion and blocks any attempt to characterize art as merely religion's handmaid.
3. See also Schechner 1987.
4. For a description of the changes in philosophy which led to the focus on language, see Korten 1967.
5. "Reference" and "mapping" are being used broadly here to include such functions of language as expression; there is no intention to limit the language-like features of art and ritual to denotation or representation. See below, p. 9.

what extent are artworks also additions to the territory, i.e., intriguing objects in their own right rather than signs pointing to something else?⁶

It is likewise no accident that the contemporary discussion in ritual studies is concerned with the symbolic structure of ritual. Given that rituals are akin to artworks and that artworks are language-like, it is appropriate that attention be paid to the linguistic and quasi-linguistic features of ritual. Current investigations range from studies of liturgical language to inquiries into the status of rituals as dramatic performances which communicate. Citing Paul Ricoeur as an example, Lawrence Sullivan points out that "scholars often apply strategies derived from textual studies to the interpretation of cultural performance" (1986:2).⁷ Note that the symbolic structure of ritual relates not only to text and drama but to music, dance, sculpture, painting, and even architecture. In each case, the same two questions will naturally arise: (1) To the extent that rituals are "maps," how and what do they map? (2) Can rituals be viewed as additions to the territory, as non-referring brute facts or events? We will address these issues at several points in the following discussion.

C. ART AND RITUAL AS KNOWLEDGE

A vast philosophical literature about how the arts create and transmit knowledge stretches from Plato's era to the present.⁸ An important contribution to this discussion is Nelson Goodman's book *Languages of Art* (1968). Summarizing his view of the noetic function of art under the heading "Art and the Understanding," Goodman claims that the differences between the arts and the sciences are not those normally assumed. It is not,

6. On the topic of artworks as material objects rather than maps, see Kauschenberg 1981. Chiding expressionist painters for using colors to express feelings, an aim he sees as coercive because a particular response is expected from the viewer, Kauschenberg asserted in an interview: "Red is a color! [That is, it is not primarily a symbol, of passion, say.] Jasper [Johns] and I thought what we were working with were *materials*, not metaphors. They [e.g., patches of color] were not intended as something else. It was a breakthrough in art's history. We meant what we did."
7. Sullivan refers to the seminal essay by Ricoeur, "The Model of the Text" (1979).
8. The literature on art and knowledge reaches from Plato to Santayana (1905) and on to more recent works such as Purser 1937, Hospers 1946, and Goodman 1968.

for example, the difference between feeling and fact, beauty and truth, or intuition and inference. It is, he says, "rather a difference in domination of certain specific characteristics of symbols" (1968:264). That is, the *languages* of the arts differ from the *languages* of the sciences, but their most general powers and purposes do not. Goodman goes on to say that the arts, like the sciences, figure in "the creation and comprehension of our worlds" (1968:265).⁹ One can infer from this statement that the arts provide unique forms of knowledge.

Transposed to the field of ritual studies, the question is: do rituals have a noetic function? This issue is addressed by Theodore Jennings in his essay "On Ritual Knowledge" (1982).¹⁰ He claims that rituals are instruments for gaining as well as communicating certain kinds of knowledge. "Ritual activity," he states, "may serve as a mode of inquiry and discovery." Further, such a thesis "is critical because the relative autonomy of ritual as a symbolic structure hinges on it" (1982:112). Ritual provides a unique perspective not reducible to other modes of inquiry. Finally, in a phrase very close to Goodman's, Jennings says that ritual is "one way in which human beings construe and construct their world" (1982:112).¹⁰ How ritual in general and Zoroastrian liturgy in particular help to construe and construct the world will be the focus of part two.

D. ART AND RITUAL AS EXPRESSION OF FEELING

Expressionism as an aesthetic theory is a celebration of art's ability to express our feelings and mirror our emotional life.¹¹ Often the view is put exclusively: it is the essence of art that artworks communicate feeling; this is what they do, and they do it better

9. See also Goodman 1978.
10. See also Sullivan 1986:5: "all successful and enlightening theories of performance are attempts to delineate, analyze, or interpret the specific quality of knowledge that underlies human action during cultural performance."
11. One might think that expressionism is one form of instrumentalism, that art is an instrument for transmitting feelings. Instrumentalism, however, is the view that art is a means to ends which lie outside the realm of *aesthetics proper*. But when we think of the modern movement of expressionism, the expression of feeling is taken to be the essence of art and thus to belong to aesthetics proper. Tolstoy's theory (see above, p. 5) is both expressionist and instrumentalist. For him, art is essentially a language for the expression of feeling, and good art is an instrument for the transmission of religious feelings.

than any other means. In this spirit, Tolstoy says, "whereas by words a man transmits his thoughts to another, by means of art he transmits his feelings" (1896:1960:49). Susanne Langer, separated from Tolstoy by half a century, gives a more detailed account of the language-like features of the arts which explain how artists can "create forms symbolic of human feeling" and thus objectify subjective feeling (1953:40). She says the great virtue of works of art is that they capture and freeze a feeling, so that we can study it (1967:67). Unfortunately, expressionism lends itself to the overly simple view that the sciences describe the facts while the arts express feelings, a position sometimes related to the positivistic claim that ethical, religious, philosophical, and artistic "statements" are *merely* expressions of feeling.¹²

In ritual studies likewise, we find an emphasis on the expressive power of ritual performance, the power to both symbolize and arouse feelings. Bruce Kapferer, for example, in his extensive analysis of Sri Lankan exorcist rituals, asserts that the organization of dance gesture is "a culturally recognizable modeling of emotion or feeling, . . . a feeling form [which is] a model for the reality of experience" (1983:195). This is a view of ritual as the dynamic mapping of our feeling life. Like expressionistic theories in the arts, however, positivistic attempts to reduce the representational features of the ritual may be de-emphasized or overlooked entirely.¹³ In what follows, we will try to demonstrate how the expression of feeling in ritual is integrated with these other functions.

E. ART, RITUAL, AND FORM

Formalism is one of the dominant aesthetic theories of our time, equal in importance to expressionism. According to the formalist

12. For a classic statement of Logical Positivism, see Ayer 1946.
13. Tambiah is critical of those who "reduce a highly formalized and structured system to the spontaneous expression of emotion with no intellectual content" (1968:200). A similar manifestation of positivism is the mistake of taking ritual practice merely to add emotional force to theological or mythical content. That ritual is more than this is argued below; see, particularly, pp. 142-43.

vision, any representational, expressive, or instrumental features an artwork possesses are irrelevant to its status as art. The only aesthetically relevant feature of an artwork is its intrinsic form. Good artworks have "significant form," and the traditional project of uncovering the *meaning* of the work is replaced by the task of describing its *formal features*. In the case of painting, formal features are such qualities as texture, shape, scale, line, and color. Formalism, then, concentrates on what we might call the purely aesthetic qualities of the work and ignores such relational features as the artist's intentions, the effects of the work and the response of the audience.

Taking a formalist position with respect to the purported connections, symbolic or otherwise, between the artwork and the world, Clive Bell says:

... to appreciate a work of art we need bring with us nothing from life, no knowledge of its ideas and affairs, no familiarity with its emotions. Art transports us from the world of man's activity to a world of aesthetic exaltation. For a moment we are shut off from human interests. . . . The pure mathematician rapt in his studies knows a state of mind which I take to be similar, if not identical. He feels an emotion for his speculations which arises from no perceived relation between them and the lives of men. . . . (1914; 1981:27)¹⁴

Art's value is intrinsic value; in its presence we experience the pure delight of pattern and design.

One important effect of formalism is that it provides a rational for the claim that art is an autonomous enterprise. Art-works are not to be judged in terms of their representational, political, ethical, or religious content, but only in terms of their formal features. Hence, formalism is fiercely anti-instrumentalist. One might say that it concentrates on the "grammar" rather than the meaning of an artwork.

Turning to ritual, one sees related issues emerge in Frits Staal's controversial and provocative essay "The Meaninglessness of Ritual." Staal pictures ritual as an autonomous activity performed for its own sake." He says:

A widespread but erroneous assumption about ritual is that it consists in symbolic activities which refer to something else. It is

14. See also Fry 1920.

characteristic of a ritual performance, however, that it is self-contained and self-absorbed. The performers are totally immersed in the proper execution of their complex tasks. Isolated in their sacred enclosure, they concentrate on correctness of act, recitation and chant. Their primary concern, if not obsession, is with rules. There are no symbolic meanings going through their minds when they are engaged in performing ritual. (1979:3)

Staal develops from this observation the radical hypothesis that "ritual has no meaning, goal, or aim," and he claims that the hypothesis accounts for the facts that ritual languages are often dead languages, that no theory of ritual meaning has gained wide support, and that ritual practitioners when asked what they are doing rarely refer to symbolic activity. Further, he wants to claim that "whatever value it [ritual] has is intrinsic value," and that understanding this idea highlights the connection between ritual practice and "desirelessness" as stressed, for example, in Buddhism and Taoism (1979:8-10). Finally, Staal suggests that ritual theory should consist primarily in describing the practice itself and uncovering its "syntactical" rules (1979:Sec. 4). In his denial of meaning, his insistence on the intrinsic value and autonomy of ritual, and his recommendation that theorists content themselves with uncovering the grammatical rules of the practice, Staal shows himself to be the equivalent in ritual studies of the formalist in aesthetics. These are important issues which we will address in some detail.

Thus, artworks present themselves both as instruments of knowledge and as ends in themselves, both as language and object and as representative, expressive, and purely formal objects. There is a long and subtle tradition of philosophical musings about the nature of art that is waiting, so to speak, to be applied to contemporary questions in ritual studies.¹⁵ In what follows, we will develop aesthetic categories for the description of ritual performance and illustrate their use by suggesting applications to the Zoroastrian Yasna and Afrinagan ceremonies.

15. There are many more areas of convergence between aesthetics and ritual theory than the ones surveyed in these introductory remarks. For example, arts connection to the institutions of the "artworld," problems and paradoxes about the definition of "art," and questions about the nature of criticism all find parallels in the study of ritual. For a ground-breaking exploration of the complex role of criticism in ritual practice and ritual studies, see Grimes 1990.

Part One

RITUAL SPACES

... normally, the lure of the [art] object is greater than the distractions that compete with it. It is not the perceptive who discounts the surroundings, but the work of art which, if it is successful, detaches itself from the rest of the world. . . . Every real work of art has a tendency to appear thus dissociated from its mundane environment. The most immediate impression it creates is one of "otherness"

—SUSANNE LANGER
*Feeling and Form:
A Theory of Art*

THREE SPACES IN ART AND THE YASNA RITUAL

Close observation of the richness and complexity of the art of Zoroastrian liturgical performance suggests that a successful theory of ritual must operate on many levels. The celebration of the Zoroastrian daily high liturgy, the Yasna, for example, has components parallel to the visual, performative, and literary arts.¹ We will propose a model, derived from the field of aesthetics,² for the interpretation of this type of ritual.³ The model is based on what we call "ritual spaces," and this idea in turn is an extension of Susanne Langer's discussion of "virtual space" in the visual arts (Langer 1953:chap. 5).⁴ Implications of the interpretive model will also be explored, including the following questions: what is the role of ritual language, how are the various dimensions of the ritual related, and what are some of the basic functions of liturgical performance? This essay, comprising chapters 2 through 5, begins with analysis and concludes with synthesis.

A. THE SPACES DESCRIBED

1. PHYSICAL SPACE

There are at least three kinds of "space" which interact with each other in an artwork such as a drama or painting. As we will

1. For recent studies of Zoroastrian ritual, see, e.g., Kotwal and Boyd 1977 and 1991.
2. Kapferer, for example, calls for such a shift to aesthetics. He says that anthropologists "have given insufficient attention to the significance of aesthetic form in ritual, (1983:179). See also Schechner 1987:13).
3. Part one suggests that these interpretive categories, derived from the literature in the philosophy of art, are applicable to at least those types of high liturgies that are performed by specified persons (e.g., priests, rabbis) in religiously designated locations (temples, churches, synagogues). Except for the public Atrinegan ceremony analyzed in part two, we have yet to explore the applications of our categories to other types of ritual. For a more extensive typology of ritual and the place of liturgy within that scheme, see Crimes 1982:43ff.
4. Kapferer also makes use of Langer's views, though his emphasis is different from our own (see 1983:194-95).

see, these spaces are detectable in ritual situations as well. The most obvious one is the *physical space*, the artwork as material object or physical event in the space/time continuum it inhabits. Like any physical terrain, the physical space of an artwork can be photographed, measured, touched, or, in the case of drama, walked through; it is in the realm of real objects and events. In a drama, for example, the physical space is the stage with its proscenium arch, the stage setting and the actors and their movements. Or, if the medium in question is ceramics—a vessel, perhaps—the physical space is just the vessel itself and the contained volume; it is that which can be carried, filled, or broken. The physical space is the art object or event as it is "objectively," not as it is subjectively experienced.⁵

2. MEANING SPACE

A second kind of "space," to extend the metaphor, is the artwork's *meaning space*. This complex dimension has to do with what the work represents or expresses, its conceptual significance and symbolic structure. The meaning space in a dramatic performance is what the set, actors, and action represent—e.g., events in the life of Prince Hamlet in medieval Denmark.⁶ Thus,

5. We are using "space" to indicate an abstract realm of possibilities or a set of dimensions as well as actual spatial characteristics. "Physical space" encompasses spatial, auditory, kinaesthetic, and temporal features of artworks—all that can be considered properties of physical objects or events. In doing this, we have no intention to privilege space over time. In subsequent sections, we continue to use "space" both literally and figuratively, and we extend it to cover the symbolic and imagistic aspects of artworks. It will serve as a generic term facilitating discussion of the interactions among these various features of art and ritual. In its metaphorical applications, "space" stands in for such words as "feature," "characteristic," "dimension," "set of dimensions," and "realm." In our view, these alternative phrases lack the rhetorical force of "space" and its natural association with the various spaces that contend within visual artworks and the sacred spaces of ritual performance. Further, several of the alternative expressions are appropriate only in some contexts and not in others.

6. In saying that the meaning space in *Hamlet* involves only reference to the historical prince, we are greatly oversimplifying, since the characters may be said, for example, to represent kinds of individuals or to model various aspects of our lives. Further, for simplicity we have talked of what the work represents, i.e., its *referent*, when what we are really speaking about is the *meaning* of the work, not the thing or fact to which that meaning refers. In the case of ordinary language, for example, we are speaking of, say, the sense of "the world's highest mountain" rather than the referent of that phrase, the actual Mount Everest. In his last film, *After the Rehearsal*, Ingmar Bergman says about the dramatic stage that there, "everything represents, nothing is." In so saying, he is emphasizing

the distinction between meaning and physical spaces is in part the familiar distinction between character and actor. Meaning space is likely to have many levels or dimensions. An opera, for example, will typically exhibit several kinds of meaning at once. Not only does the libretto have conceptual significance in all the ways in which natural languages used poetically have meaning, but at the same time the characters denote or portray, the music expresses, the sets represent, and various features of the overall structure mirror or model aspects of our experience. In short, when we speak of meaning space, we are viewing artworks as "maps" rather than as additions to the territory; that is, as articulating sign systems semantically linked to the world in a variety of ways.⁷

3. VIRTUAL SPACE

The third kind of space we will call *virtual space*, a term borrowed from optics as well as aesthetics.⁸ This space is more difficult to talk about and may be easily overlooked. It refers to a complex and heterogeneous set of interrelated features. Examples drawn from the arts provide the most promising means for describing it.

a. **Drama.** Virtual space as it occurs in the theater is quite to the point. Again, we will be using "space" in part metaphorically. In a successfully performed drama, a separate "time-space" is created which we experience as virtually real in its own right. If, for example, the play includes a well-acted sword fight, we will experience the scene as real action in the present. It is perceived as actual behavior, though technically it is counterfeited. The attentive observer, capable of suspension of disbelief, becomes involved in the action and thus enters virtual space. A similar point can be made about the temporal duration of the meaning space. Even the couch which is part of the set is not just a couch; it

7. Langer claims that the arts provide us with "non-discursive sign systems" which are language-like and have "import" if not "meaning" in the straightforward sense (1953). Goodman also uses the phrase "sign system" and speaks, as we have seen, of the "languages of art" and the kinds of references typical of them (1968).

8. See, particularly, Langer 1953: chap. 5. In optics, a virtual image, such as a mirror image or a rainbow, is visible even though it is not really there. It is opposed to a real image, like that produced on a screen by a slide projector: the latter can be intercepted by the screen; the former cannot.

About dance movements and, by extension, dramatic action, she said:

Gesture is vital movement: to the one who performs it, it is known very precisely as a kinetic experience, i.e., as action, and somewhat more vaguely by sight, as an effect. To others it appears as a visible motion, but not a motion of things, sliding or waving or rolling around—it is seen and understood as vital movement.^(1953:174)¹¹

Langer is hinting here at the subtlety of the concept of virtual space. This concept might be better understood by considering the movements of marionettes. When the puppeteer pulls the string, the audience does not see an arm-like object rising; it sees a being (the doll character) raising its arm. It is this perception on the part of the audience of "vital movement" which underlies

where the element of representation is absent, where nothing is imitated or feigned—in a lovely textile, a pot, a building, a sonata—this air of it-lustion, of being a sheer image, exists as forcibly as in the most deceptive picture or the most plausible narrative. Where an expert in the particular art in question perceives immediately a "tightness and necessity" of forms, the unversed but sensitive spectator perceives only a peculiar air of "otherness," which has been variously described as "strangeness," "semblance," "illusion," "transparency," "autonomy," or "self-sufficiency."^(1953:45-46)

Notice that what we have called "real" with respect to the sword fight, Langer would call "illusory." Both statements are ways of distinguishing the special force of the scene from the mundane, everyday actions of the actors when, for example, they are lounging about between acts or merely going through their lines. 11. A related and philosophically interesting point is made by Deleuze in his book about the nature of film art, *Cinema I*. Commenting on Bergson's view of movement, Deleuze says,

"According to the first thesis [of Bergson], movement is distinct from the space covered. Space covered is past, movement is present, the act of covering. The space covered is divisible, indeed infinitely divisible, whilst movement is indivisible, or cannot be divided without changing qualitatively each time it is divided. This already presupposes a more complex idea: the spaces covered all belong to a single, identical, homogeneous space, while the movements are heterogeneous, irreducible among themselves."^(1983:1)

In this passage, Deleuze highlights the complexity of the relationship between perceived movement and traversed space. This is a first step toward understanding film art, for the cinema presents us with the *image* of movement. Deleuze's subtle explication illustrates that there is more than one path to the analysis of the virtual qualities of dramatic artworks.

play. The drama may actually require ninety minutes (physical time), it may represent events during an imagined time long ago (time meant), but we may also feel that we are perceiving a series of events presently occurring over a period of several days (virtual time).

Though virtual space is essentially related to both physical and meaning space, it is something separable from these two. It is a third kind of experienced reality. When Othello smothers Desdemona, it is as if we are witness to present, real violence (virtual space). At the same time, we know that it is being feigned (acted by persons in physical space), so we do not rush on stage to save her; and we know as well that it represents a time long past, so we are apt to say afterward that we were transported by the play to Renaissance Venice (meaning space). That this virtual, present violence is neither the physical nor the meaning space is apparent if we imagine the play poorly acted. For in that situation, we still know what the action being represented is and when it is purported to have happened, but we no longer feel present at a violent murder; rather we are merely observers of bad acting. We may, for example, feel embarrassment for the actors instead of awe and fear at the murder. We are, in short, thrown back on the physical and meaning spaces, because the inept actors have failed to create a viable virtual space. The fact that there are these three distinct aspects to the drama is generally disguised by our language. If I say, for example, that Booth was such a powerful actor that people fainted when Othello killed Desdemona, I have made covert reference to all three spaces in one utterance.⁹

It was Susanne Langer who first called attention to the virtual aspects of the arts and carefully described them.¹⁰

9. For a related discussion of the complexities of drama, see Schenker 1987:15.
10. It should be noted that the terms "physical" and "meaning space" are Langer introduces the concept of virtual space by describing how we feel in the presence of artworks.

Every real work of art has a tendency to appear thus dissociated from its mundane environment. The most immediate impression it creates is one of "otherness" from reality—the impression of an illusion enfolding the thing, action, statement, or flow of sound that constitutes the work. Even

what we called the sense of present real action when describing the sword fighting scene and Orhelo's murderous act. This is dramatic virtual space.¹²

b. Painting. The visual arts also offer examples of virtual space. In fact, the original and more literal application of the idea of different kinds of *space* is found in the aesthetics of painting. The physical space of a painting is its material, physical aspect, e.g., the oil on the canvas. When we speak of buying a painting and hanging it above the sofa, we are referring to its physical space. In addition, a painting typically represents, portrays, or symbolizes something: it is a portrait of George Washington, or it represents a farm house, or the colors in it symbolize courage and purity, and so on. The painting may even do several of these things at once. Such qualities are those of meaning space.

But a painting can also *appear* to be other than a flat, painted splattered canvas. Some colors appear to be in front of other colors, or we lose sight of the individual paint strokes in favor of an image, or the painting strikes us as rough when actually it is smooth. It is of the essence of painting that when we look at a painting, we are perceiving a visual space exhibiting qualities such as depth which the flat canvas does not possess (see Fig. 1).¹³ A painting of the Last Supper, for example, may ap-

12. Notice that to see vital movement requires interpretation; we must see the actor's movements not as mere translations of physical objects but as human actions of certain sorts. If we think of interpretation as the imparting of meaning, then virtual space is in this instance not entirely separate from meaning space. Nevertheless, we can make at least a rough distinction between the artists' creation of a virtual space and his use of that space to mirror, refer to, portray, model, etc., something else. For example, the kind of misty space so prominent in Chinese painting has traditionally been explained in terms of the Taoist concept of the void from which all things arise. But contemporary painters, operating in a very different context, can use that virtual space, say, to convey subjective feeling.

13. Figure 1 is taken from Kanizsa 1976. The pure white square is visible despite the absence of an explicit outline, and it can appear to hover above the page. That it could represent, for example, the perfection of a Platonic ideal is due to this supra-mundane appearance rather than to the actual, physical marks on the page. See also below, "The Independence of Virtual Space," p. 25. The "square" is an optical illusion rather than an artwork, but there are (more complex) examples from fine art about which similar points can be made. In 1918, Kasimir Malevich (U.S.S.R.) painted a thinly outlined, tilted white square on a white background entitled "Supremacist Composition: White on White" (see

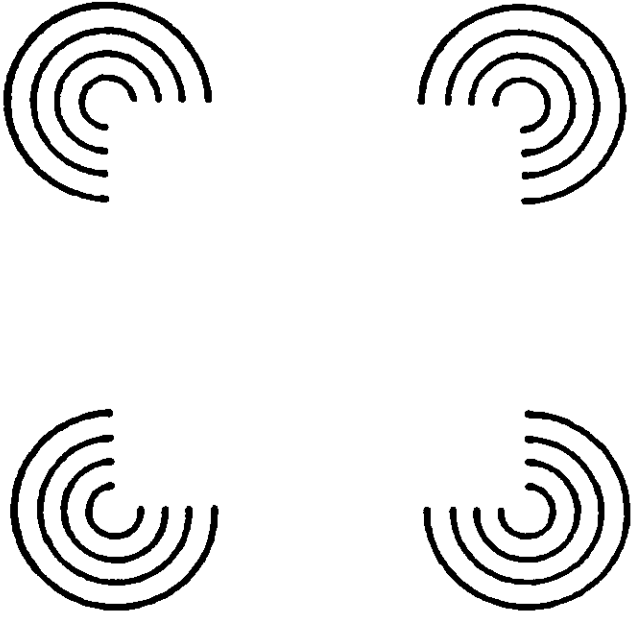


Fig. 1. An Example of Visual Virtual Space

pear two feet deep—so much so that we are tempted to look at it from the side to see if it actually has such depth. We are not referring here to its meaning space, i.e., to the fact that the painting is intended to represent a room twenty feet deep. Rather, we are referring to the appearance of depth in the painting, a feature of its virtual space. The more experience we have with art, the more readily we can see virtual space.¹⁴

Lipsey 1988:138-39). Robert Rauschenberg's infamous "White Painting" (1951) is a canvas uniformly covered with flat white house-paint, creating a space responsive to ambient shadows (see Rauschenberg 1976:2, 66).

14. When we evaluate a painting, it is the physical object as it *appears*—i.e., the "image"—which we are in part evaluating. Often we evaluate an artwork in terms of its meaning as well, so both virtual and meaning spaces are at issue. Artists are skilled at combining the spaces in different ways. A Renaissance perspectival painting, for example, emphasizes representation and apparent depth (meaning and virtual spaces) while a modern non-figurative painting—e.g., by Barnett Newman or Mark Rothko—presents the artwork as a thing in its own right, not a mere copy. So in these instances, physical space (together with virtual

The art critic Robert Hughes, trying to account for his love of the coolly abstract paintings of Mondrian while at the same time disparaging modern formalist architecture, says:

And why should Mondrian's last paintings still move us, whereas the Utopian city plans of architects do not? Partly, no doubt, because the space of art is the ideal one of fiction. In it, things are not used and they never decay; one cannot walk in a painting as one walks along a street or through a building. The paintings are incorruptible. They are the real rudiments of Paradise, the building blocks of a system that has no relationship at all to our bodies, except through the ocular perception of colour. (1981:207)

He is speaking of virtual space, for it is a *purely visual* space. It would make no sense, for example, to ask of a visual image what sounds occur in it, though we could ask of a physical space—the stretched canvas—what noise it would make if dropped. Statements having to do with visual appearance are the only appropriate ones to make in discussing the painting's virtual space. Thus, when Hughes says of a painting that it is incorruptible, he is not speaking of the physical object, which sooner or later requires restoration, but of the virtual image which, being illusory, is not the kind of thing that can decay, though it would cease to be visible if the physical object were destroyed. This last point, the dependence of virtual space upon physical space, brings to the forefront the interrelatedness of these spaces, a topic we will examine in more detail later. For the present, let us simply state that the three spaces are the object, the appearance of the object, and the significance of the object as it appears.

c. **Architecture and Dance.** Counterparts to the three spaces we are discussing can be found in any of the arts. An architectural masterwork such as India's Taj Mahal is more than a white marble tomb (physical and meaning spaces, respectively). The white marble, the scale (it is thirty-four stories high), and the fact that it rests on a darker sandstone foundation make it seem in the light of sunrise to be more a Platonic idea than a physical object; and under a full moon, it appears to float off the

space) is given prominence over meaning space. Newman has said that instead of representing space in his paintings, he *presents* space.

ground. These virtual features make it the awe-inspiring work it is. They are difficult to capture in photographs, partly because photos have their own virtual space and so amount to a translation. Consider another example: the performance of a Chinese dragon dance. The dragon's head is manipulated by the lead dancer, and its body is composed of a cloth train held up on poles by six other dancers. Even though the dancers and the poles are clearly visible, there are moments when the dragon takes on a life of its own. It becomes, virtually, a living dragon. It is worth mentioning here that the interpenetration of the three spaces is essential to the effect. For we must know that what we see represents a supernatural entity and at the same time is not a real dragon—physically it is merely dancers, cloth, and poles. Yet during these special moments when it is virtually real, we can have the experience of glimpsing a reality which transcends the mundane world of physical objects. In general, it is the complex interrelation of the kinds of space which gives the arts their power.

d. **Music.** Music will be our last example. When a knowledgeable listener or trained musician listens to a classical orchestral composition, that person is put in touch with an auditory structure which is related to but not reducible to the actual sounds of the performance. The physical space consists of the actual musical sounds made by the musicians. The meaning space encompasses such features as the expression of feelings and, if the work is programmatic music, the musical representation of, say, an afternoon thunderstorm or the song of a bird. But the virtual space in music is distinguishable from both these sets of aspects. If we listen to a recorded performance of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, we perceive a sensuous, purely auditory virtual space which is informed by the formal structure of the piece, that structure which is delineated by the score. If the record is badly scratched, we can still hear the unblemished piece "beneath" the needle noise. In Jean Paul Sartre's novel *Nausea*, the protagonist describes the experience of listening to a scratched recording of "Some of These Days":¹⁵

15. In chap. 8 of part two, we present a detailed analysis of this section of Sartre's novel, for the protagonist's highly unusual encounter with the phonograph record provides an excellent example of the effects of repetitive ritual.

4. THE INDEPENDENCE OF VIRTUAL SPACE

The reader will have noticed from these examples that the definitions separating virtual space from physical and meaning spaces are sometimes problematic.¹⁸ For the purposes of our interpretation of virtual space, even though we may in some cases be dealing with a continuum of spaces rather than with sharp boundaries. We do this for at least two reasons: (1) to highlight a dimension of the arts (and ritual) which is fundamental to their reality as *artworks*, thereby giving a name to those mysterious qualities which present themselves to us in artworks and which are in need of interpretation; (2) to call attention to the dual role that virtual space plays in relation to the other two spaces. Virtual space exists, metaphorically, in between the meaning and physical spaces, in that it functions to heighten our experience not only of the meaning of artworks, but of their physical presence as well.

B. APPLICATION TO ZOROASTRIAN RITUAL

Our principal thesis is that the above distinctions can be applied directly to ritual situations. The case in point will be the austere and precise high liturgy, the Zoroastrian Yasna.¹⁹ The Yasna ("worship") liturgy, combined with its preparatory service, is one of the most important daily rituals performed within the precincts of a Zoroastrian fire temple. The purpose of the ritual, seen from within the tradition and employing the theological categories of Zoroastrianism, is to please the exalted Lord of Wisdom, Ahura Mazda, and all spirit beings of His good creation.²⁰ The Yasna reminds the participants of their role in the larger struggle, the cosmic battle between good and evil. By establishing an area replete with purity and righteousness, the enacted ritual contributes to the decrease of evil and the

Someone must have scratched the record, . . . because it makes an odd noise. And there is something that clutches the heart: the melody is absolutely untouched by this tiny coughing of the needle on the record. It is so far—so far behind. I understand that too: the disc is scratched and wearing out, perhaps the singer is dead. . . . But behind the existence which falls from one present to the other, without a past, without a future, behind these sounds which decompose from day to day, peel off and slip towards death, the melody stays the same, young and firm, like a pitiless witness. (1938, 1964: 174–76)¹⁶

These distinctions are difficult enough to warrant further explanation. We say that we heard a *performance* of "One of These Days." Arguably, the composition itself is an ideal structure, an abstract sequence of notes, which informs each performance. The virtual space of the composition is essentially related to this ideal structure, but it is not to be identified with it. Strictly speaking, the structure itself cannot be heard, yet it is heard by the sophisticated listener when instantiated in the performance. Musical virtual space is revealed by the experience of hearing that ideal structure separately from whatever noise or other imperfections veil it. Rather than the coughing of the needle being an interruption in the melody (as it actually is, physically), we hear the surface noise as just that, as a sound laid over the music, which goes on unflawed and uninterrupted "underneath."¹⁷ Finally, we should point out that the feature of musical virtual space we are describing is not the only virtual feature in music. Langer, for example, points to the fact that we hear music as if the melody were going up and down, though physically, of course, we are merely hearing sounds of various pitches, vibrations which vary in wavelength but not in altitude.

16. The philosophical arguments about the ontological status of musical works are reviewed in Wollheim 1968: chap. 1.
17. In a novel contemporary with Sartre's *Nausea*, Hesse's *Steppenwolf*, the protagonist, Harry Haller, fantasizes a conversation with Mozart. When Haller complains about hearing a composition by Handel over the radio, distorted and almost drowned out by static, Mozart invites him to attend more closely: "Just listen . . . without either pathos or mockery, while far away behind the veil of this hopelessly idiotic ridiculous apparatus the form of this divine music passes by. . . . When you listen to radio you are a witness of the everlasting war between idea and appearance, between time and eternity, between the human and the divine" (1929: 241–42).

18. See n. 12 above, and chap. 4 below.
19. See Boyd and Darrow 1982, and n. 1 above.
20. The fundamental purpose of the liturgy is succinctly stated in the Avestan recitation which accompanies the ritual act of libation: "among the righteous spirit beings, I desire to please and make offerings to thee [Ahura Mazda]; and for the exalted lord, he [the priest] should chant the Gathas" (*yazatnam thua ashaoanam kushishtisha us-bi-bardamti rathwasha berezaiti gathascha sraueyoti*) (Korwaal and Boyd 1977: 34).

increase of all that is good and bountiful. In order to celebrate this liturgy, the chief priest, called a "purifier" (Avestan: *yōzadhraṅgar*) of creation, together with his assistant, must previously have completed several purification rituals, be in good health, and know with utmost accuracy the holy Avestan *manthra* and the appropriate sequence of ritual activities.

1. PHYSICAL SPACE

The ritual is conducted within a fixed enclosure (the *paui*),

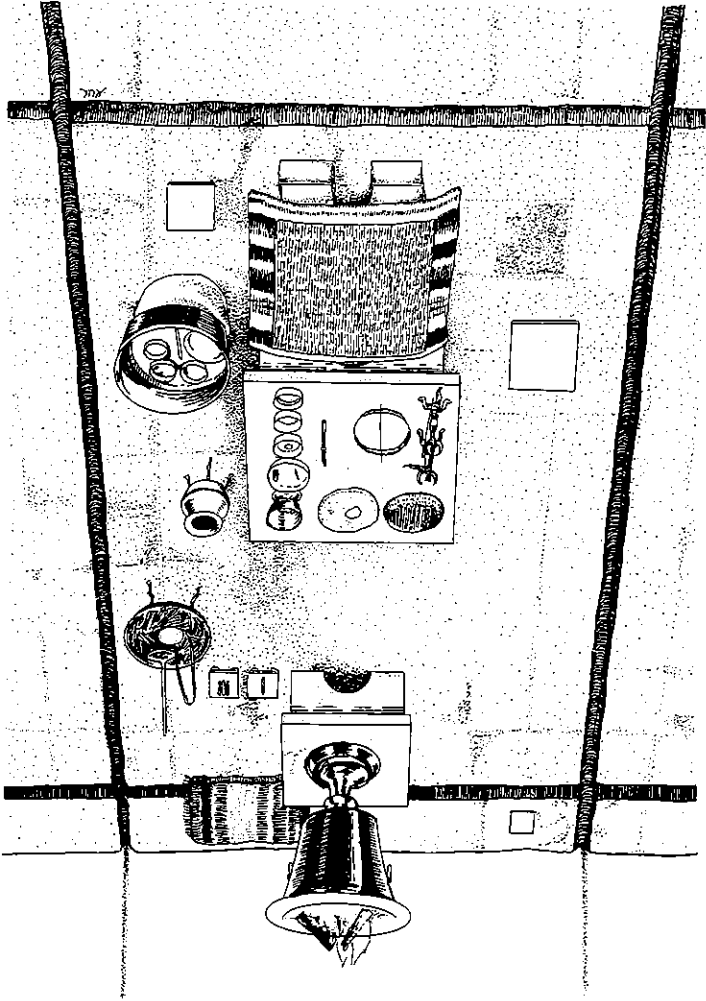
a two-by-three-and-one-half-meter area demarcated by means of furrows or channels built into the floor of the temple building (see Fig. 2). Within this space are a silver-metal fire vase set upon a stone stand, a large metal basin of water, a ritual stone table set with numerous utensils and other ritual implements, e.g., a mortar and pestle, saucers, cups, a sieve used for filtering a sacramental drink called *hom*, two crescent-shaped metal stands, a bundle of metal wires called *barsom*, and a dish containing sacramental bread. The head priest sits or stands during much of the ceremony on a stone seat covered with a woven rug. Among the ritual items the priest purifies are a date-palm leaf, pomegranate and *hom* twigs, sacramental bread, hairs from a living consecrated white bull, and well-water. Outside this space is a bench for Zoroastrians who wish to observe the ceremony. Two priests, dressed in white and wearing priestly turbans and white masks, conduct the liturgy in the presence of the fire. The two-and-one-half-hour ceremony takes place during the morning hours when the sun is in ascendancy. A moderate amount of daylight comes through the small windows high above the floor.

2. MEANING SPACE

In addition to the purposes of the ritual already stated, the meaning space of the liturgy is complex and multi-layered. For example, the entire ritual area and all objects and events within it are a model of a larger reality—a microcosm that refers to a macrocosm. According to some interpreters, the ritual area "symbolizes the world, with fire representing the sun, the table the earth, and the crescent-shaped stands the moon".²¹ It is essential that the sacred

21. For a detailed discussion of the interrelationship of the Yasna liturgy and Zoroastrian cosmology, see Windfuhr typscript.

Fig. 2. The Ritual Space (*paui*) and Its Furnishings



the qualities possessed by a ritual priest (Boyd and Darrow 1982). In the language of this study, he experiences a virtual space not reducible to its symbolic-propositional value or to mere physical setting, a space composed of visual and auditory qualities that create a new matrix of significance. One might surmise that the radiance of the light of the ritual fire, plus the sounds of intoned *manthra*, the sequence of gestures that constitute the sacramental drink and bread, and the Zoroastrian world-view as mental context, all contribute to the creation of this virtual space.

Let us look more specifically at certain visual, auditory, and gestural aspects of the liturgy to see how they might affect the experience of virtual space.

a. Signs

i. Borders. We noted above that the space in which the Yasna is celebrated is a well-defined, two-dimensional area, an enclosure fixed by channels in the floor. What is less obvious is that the area designated by the channels also defines the location of

invisible vertical "walls" which constitute the space as a volume rather than a plane. Observers of the liturgy are acutely aware of the invisible vertical dimension of the channels marking its outer limits, particularly when either priest steps through this unseparable but very important plane which separates the purified realm from the remainder of the world. These invisible walls are a particular sort of virtual phenomenon. It is not a matter of seeing an illusory appearance of something, like depth in the flat canvas, but of sensing or intuiting something that cannot be seen at all. Since these imagined boundaries are invisible, they possess the ideal purity of geometrical forms (see Fig. 1). So important are the walls that when the sacred space is to be extended, a bridge must be constructed by laying a long-handled ladle across the channel.

ii. Costume/Mask. The mask worn by a priest over his nose and mouth has the effect, visually, of presenting us with the face of a being who sees but does not speak. The image thus suggests a move away from meaning space to some sort of silence or purely auditory space without conventional meaning. Further, the white costuming transforms the priest into a dramatic, masked character. He becomes a person-type; personal identity

space function as a model or map of the larger world, for then all acts of purification and consecration express purification of that world. More specifically, and again employing theological categories, we may say that every item within this sacred space, once consecrated and made pure, manifests the presence of its corresponding "Bountiful Immortal." The ritual area of purified stone manifests the spirit of Devotion. Similarly, the consecrated water and plants and sacramental bread (*dron*) become the actualized presence of the cosmic principles of Health and Life. The hairs from the (uncastated) white bull are the material presence of the holy power of Good Intention. The consecrated fire in its radiance is a spark of the infinite, the "son of God" (Avestan: *ahura ahurawe mazdao puthra*), a physical embodiment of the principle of cosmic Order (*asha*). Like the crystal sky which was conceived as metallic by Zarathushtra, the metal implements embody the power of Dominion. Finally, the officiating priest is the representative of the Lord of Wisdom Himself (Abura Mazda).

In addition, there are other aspects of the ritual performance more directly related to the dramatic, visual, and performing arts which have meaning in ways typical of art. The shapes of the vessels, the bell-like sounds, and the dramatic gestures of the priests are all emotionally expressive as well as referentially significant. The vigorous ringing of the mortar with the pestle, for example, signifies victory over the powers of evil. The solemn gesture of feeding the fire is an act of reverence before the son of God; and the chanted Avestan *manthra* itself conveys meanings that, in the words of Dastur Kotwal, "can be cogent to the mind and compelling to the heart" (Kotwal and Boyd 1977:50, n. 54). We will refer again to these meanings in discussing the virtual space they help to create.

3. VIRTUAL SPACE

Part of what makes the *manthra* together with the ritual as a whole "compelling to the heart" is experienced virtual space. In ritual moments, Dastur Kotwal states, moments which require yogic-like discipline and attentiveness, there is the experience of genuine blessings and a tangible sense of "ritual power" (Kotwal and Boyd 1982:170, 185ff.). Elsewhere he speaks of this experience of special ritual power as "showing on [one's] face." "There is glory on your face," he dramatically affirms when describing

is erased. He is defined as "purifier," one who acts in a purified space (see Fig. 3).²² These latter characteristics are properties of the meaning space, but it is the dramatic virtual space that gives them their power. The situation is similar to that of a dance drama, where the movements like those of the dragon described earlier become at times divinely animated.

iii. Fire. The fire is one of the most significant elements of the ritual, though it is difficult to describe the virtual space of the flames. Different from a candle flame, which is stable, the ritual fire continuously changes, creating as virtual space an animated, unpredictable dance of forms. Against the background of ideal and static geometric shapes and the deliberate movements of the priests, the fire readily becomes a focus of attention, an example and a symbol of the animating principle of all that lives. Dastur Kotwal declares: "In the eyes of the faithful, this glow of fire and everything surrounding it would seem to be the presence of God" (Kotwal and Boyd 1982:55). Furthermore, the priest who tends the fire always approaches it with a gesture of respect, creating the dramatic effect of treating the fire as a virtual "being," a response reinforced by the meaning space definition of the fire as "He," the "son of God."

iv. Sculptures. The tables and utensils have the kinds of virtual spaces that metal and stone sculptures have. Formalistic considerations are important here, for the simple but elegant shapes of the stone tables and utensils create the impression of forms that have been "purified"; i.e., they appear perfect and necessary rather than approximate and fortuitous. The rectangular forms of the stone tables and the roundness of the silver utensils, together with the ambiguous surfaces of burnished metals—one can look into them indefinitely far—contribute to the oblique awareness of abstract, pure forms. The reflected points of light in the burnished metal appear to be within the surface rather than at the surface, like virtual mirror images. If we think these features are only matters of incidental decoration, it may be that we do not fully understand what it is to attend to the ritual events.

22. See Lamarque 1989:159 for an account of the role of the mask in Noh theater. Characterization in Noh, he says, "exemplifies individuality without personality" (italics his).



Fig. 3. Dastur Kotwal Beside the Ritual Fire

v. Water. Visually, water is equal to the fire in prominence.²³ As the Source of Health and an instrument of purification, it appears in the Yasna in several forms. There is the graceful arc of the water poured over the implements and

23. For an insightful discussion of the role and importance of water in the Yasna, see Darrow 1988:417–21.

tables to purify them. Overflowing onto the *paui* floor, the water temporarily stains it in irregular patterns which contrast with the ordered geometry of the ritual objects. At the same time, the reservoir of water in the large basin provides a mirror-like reflection of light, except when it is vigorously agitated by the priest, shattering the reflection.

vi. Architecture and Perspective. The overall pattern of the ritual space, including the brightly colored rectangular rug, gives the impression of a typical Persian miniature painting. Normal Renaissance perspective is distorted into a relatively flat composition of rectangles. Again, one's sense of unreality or abstractioned reality is heightened. Further, the ritual takes place in the sacred precincts of a fire temple. The ritual area is called "The Court of the Lord of Ritual" (Persian: *Dar-i Mitr*) and is an inner court within the precincts of a temple itself built within walls. These nested spaces and the fact that neither the outer temple nor the inner court are open to non-Zoroastrians further heighten the sense of an exclusive *sanctum sanctorum*.

b. Sounds

i. Auditory Space. Within this very secluded area of the fire temple, the attentive listener is aware of several distinct dimensions of sound: the highly selective, stylized sounds of the chant, the bell-like sound of the mortar with the accompanying pounding of the pestle, and the sounds of the stirred and poured water splashing onto the stone floor, all of which are heard against a subdued auditory background filtered of extraneous noise. The chanting, pounding, and bell sounds have the virtual attributes of music. We hear them in a purely auditory dimension—structured sequences of tones, a sensuously perceivable architecture of sound which adds to the already complex virtual dimension of the ritual as a whole. Auditory virtual space, the ideal structure perceived separately from the meanings of the words and the actual physical sounds and noises, can act as a bridge carrying the listener from meaning space to concrete physical space. That is, the nature of the sounds and the rhythm of their repetitions create a virtual space which, like the image of the mask, leads us away from meaning toward pure sound and puts us in the presence of extraordinary physical sound events possessing a severe and purified simplicity consonant with the purposes of a puri-

fication ritual. We will explore this point further in the following chapter.

ii. Mantra. Important for our present discussion is the role of the virtual sound space of the chanting. Two ancient languages are employed in the ritual: Avestan and Pahlavi. Typically, the former is articulated in a normal manner, and the latter is chanted through closed lips. The muted, inarticulate sound of the Pazand provides an occasional counterpoint to the Avestan. Together they comprise a "musical" work in two voices in which the Pazand is encircled by articulate Avestan speech. These virtual effects mirror the encirclement of all ritual action by sacred language.

c. Gestures

i. The Powerful Glance. At certain points in the liturgy, both masked priests must look directly into the eyes of the other, each situated at opposite ends of the ritual area. This visual bond, signifying connectedness, is a dramatic gesture which, combined with the exchange of vows spoken while keeping this eye-contact, creates the sense of a very special movement, an eye-gesture reminiscent of the power of Noh theater. It is dramatic virtual space which creates this special energy; it is a space not of actors or characters so much as of pure gesture.

ii. Other Movements. Whether the chief priest is standing normally, or in a position of humility with his feet together, or sitting in yogic posture, pounding, lifting the veil to throw a piece of the sacramental bread in his mouth, or walking within the ritual area, his gestures are disciplined, regulated, and reduced to their simplest form. The economy of gesture heightens the importance of each movement and creates an environment much like that of a choreographed dance.

1. ONTOLOGY OF VIRTUAL SPACE

The virtual space of this Zoroastrian liturgy is *real*. Two points need to be made about the nature of such a claim. First, by emphasizing the importance of virtual space, we are not

24. Avestan is the scriptural language and literature of the Zoroastrian tradition. Pazand is Pahlavi written in Avestan script replacing Semitic elements with their Iranian equivalents.

5. THE CREATION AND PERCEPTION OF VIRTUAL SPACE

Since virtual space is a matter of perception, it is usually discussed in terms of an audience, e.g., the viewer of an artwork, listeners in a concert hall, or a religious community in attendance at a ceremony. The Yasna is unusual in this regard, because typically there is no audience other than the performing priests themselves. So we must ask whose perception of virtual space are we talking about? The orthodox Zoroastrian answer is that the audience comprises the realm of spiritual beings (yazads).²⁸ The aesthetic focus of the present discussion, however, is on the priest's perception of virtual space, both as performer and audience. This dual role occurs in many art forms, though the relationship between artist/performer and artwork differs from one medium to another. The performing musician can hear the same music as the audience, but the dancer cannot see herself as the audience does except in the mind's eye. Similarly, the priest perceives, in the fire, water, and utensils, the same visual virtual space as any other observer, and they perceive each other's gestures and antiphonal recitations. They also know in imaginative perspective how they and the consecrated space appear. But at the same time, the priests as performers are carrying out an aesthetic strategy for the creation of virtual space involving mastery of technique, gesture, and speech. We will revisit the Yasna after a more detailed look at meaning space and a discussion of ways in which the spaces are related.

trying to reduce religious experience to aesthetic experience.²⁵ All questions about the nature of the reality with which the ritual practitioner is in touch remain open. Our task is to investigate the aesthetic dimensions of ritual power.

Secondly, to claim as we have that virtual space is real in its own terms is, of course, to make an ontological assertion.²⁶

Though, as we shall see, virtual space is intimately related to physical and meaning spaces, it is not one more portion of already existing ordinary physical reality, nor is it merely a symbolic way of mapping reality. Virtual space is an addition to perceived reality. Virtual space in ritual contexts, as in the arts, confronts the participant with something like brute fact—similar to what Dastur Kotwal calls "ritual power." In the mode of perception which encounters virtual space, the ritual performance becomes a captivating, certainly mysterious part of the terrain. Its ontological status is parallel to what the writer William Cass says about literary works: "the world of the text is a distinct and competitive addition to reality, not a mere description of reality."²⁷ For students of ritual, this observation highlights the importance of attending to the ritual enactment itself, and of not assuming that the primary subject for study is the ritual's conceptual significance. This is not to deny the importance of meaning and reference, which we take for granted. Rather, we are trying to call attention to the equally important virtual and physical aspects of ritual activity.

²⁵ For more about reductionism, see below, pp. 152–53.

²⁶ If our ontological commitments are in part dictated by our purposes and theories, then we can imagine wanting to emphasize different ones of the three spaces in different contexts by granting them ontological priority. A materialist ontology of paintings, for example, is that they are *physical objects* which appear in certain ways and function as quasi-linguistic signs. If, in contrast, we want to emphasize that the arts provide us with significant sign-systems, a painting becomes a *bearer of meaning*, like a proposition: it is of only secondary importance that the sign is a physical object which appears. Finally, it can be claimed, as formalists do, that a painting is an *image* (virtual entity); here, it is of secondary importance that the painted canvas brings the image into existence. This last perspective is like claiming that a musical piece is an abstract sequence of notes which a particular performance makes audible; we speak of performances of it. Similarly, then, a painting as physical object makes possible the viewing of the formal image which is the real artwork. Likewise, rituals can be viewed as primarily physical events, meaningful performances, or vivid dramatic images.
²⁷ William Cass, quoted in a catalog advertisement for his book *Habitations of the Word: Essays*.

²⁸ See below, chap. 3, B.2, "Application," pp. 40–42, for further discussion of the role of virtual space in assuring the efficacy of the performative invitation to the spiritual beings.

MEANING SPACE EXPLORED

We have, in effect, portrayed ritual as a set of "artworks" which represent, express, map, model, and otherwise symbolize features of the world and our experience of it. Further, the meanings expressed by word, object, or deed and the force with which they are expressed are affected by various attributes of the ritual's virtual space. Three points remain to be made: (1) some objects and events in the ritual *exemplify* rather than denote certain aspects of the world, a feature enhanced by virtual space; (2) the mantric language functions in part *performatively* to situate the participant in sacred space, and this is accomplished by virtual as well as linguistic features of the performance; and (3) to describe fully the effects of ritual language, we must attend to *word sounds* and their virtual space as well as to word meanings.

A. EXEMPLIFICATION

1. DEFINITION

Earlier we claimed that certain of the Zoroastrian ritual implements *embody, manifest, or become* instances of sacred principles or powers.¹ These are complicated notions to be sure, but part of what is happening can be explicated with the aid of the concept of exemplification developed by Nelson Goodman. His example is the tailor's swatch which exemplifies the color, pattern, and texture of the clothing (1968:50-54). Exemplification is a species of reference relation which runs in the opposite direction from denotation. For example, the word "dog" denotes the familiar canines and is true of each dog. In contrast, the grey tailor's swatch *exemplifies* that color, i.e., the swatch is itself grey; thus, the word "grey" is true of it. Hence, though both "dog" and the swatch refer, the relation of *being true of* is oppositely applied in the two cases; while "dog" is true of canines, "grey" is true of

1. See above, p. 28.

the swatch. The swatch exemplifies because it refers by being an example. Goodman's major point is that exemplification plays a larger role in the languages of the arts than in mathematical, scientific, and natural languages.

2. APPLICATION

In the Yasna, the sacred fire refers by exemplification. What it exemplifies is light and, by extension, divine presence. Note that an exemplifying sign does not refer to *every* property which is true of it. For example, the tailor's swatch does not exemplify the size of the clothing; nor does it, as Goodman points out, even exemplify all of the properties that the swatch accidentally shares with the clothing such as its having been made on a Tuesday. This is because the swatch refers only to those qualities relevant to its use as a sample. More generally put, what a sign does refer to is established by the system of concepts in which it is embedded.² In the Zoroastrian system of concepts, the fire exemplifies the son of God, an epiphany of the realm of the Lord of Wisdom. Being itself rightly ordered, the fire is understood to manifest the cosmic principle of right Order (*asha*). The point is that rather than merely denoting this principle, like the words we have used, the fire is an actual, dynamic example of it.

That the fire refers *strikingly* is due not only to its role as sample, but to other features of meaning and virtual space as well. The fire derives additional meaning from such mythopoetic expressions as "When Ahura Mazda, who resides in the endless light, created fire, he joined the radiance of this endless

2. Goodman says, "Consider a tailor's booklet of small swatches of cloth. These function as samples, as symbols exemplifying certain properties. But a swatch does not exemplify all its properties: it is a sample of color, weave, texture, and pattern, but not of size, shape, or absolute weight or value. Nor does it even exemplify all the properties—such as having been made on a Tuesday—that it shares with the given bolt or run of material. *Exemplification is possession plus reference*. To have without symbolizing is merely to possess, while to symbolize without having is to refer in some other way than by exemplifying. The swatch exemplifies only those properties that it both has and refers to. . . . *If possession is intrinsic, reference is not*; and just which properties of a symbol are exemplified depends upon what particular system of symbolization is in effect. . . ." (1968:53; italics ours).

light with fire himself."³ Further, since the fire is a center of focus in the overall visual composition of the ritual space, possesses its own virtual features, and is the recipient of the reverential gestures of the priests, it (he) becomes a subtle, but potent, virtual image.

To return to exemplification, the hairs from the white bull, featured in the opening consecration ceremony, exemplify that animal, which is in turn symbolic of the principle of Good Intention.⁴ The power of this expression is enhanced by the essential referential connection which is established between the sign and what it signifies: the hairs lose all efficacy when the bull dies. What the hairs exemplify is not just a bull's coat, but the coat of a *living* bull. By extension, the hairs signify the life of the bull and ultimately the principle of Good Intention.

There are many other relations of exemplification in the ceremony. The wigs exemplify the plants from which they are derived and thus the plant kingdom. Water exemplifies the generating power of pure primeval waters. More importantly, the high priest strives to live a righteous life so that he may exemplify purity. So it becomes apparent that the microcosmic model of which we spoke earlier is in large part made of examples rather than denoting signs, examples whose virtual powers heighten their power as exemplars. As such, the model more effectively expresses that the purification of the microcosmic ritual space and its contents purifies the macrocosm.

B. PERFORMATIVE UTTERANCE

The most obvious portion of the Yasna's meaning space is the spoken Avestan chant, which has both informative and performative features. At the beginning of the recitation of the Yasna text, both priests recite in unison a mantric invocation, translated portions of which are:

I invite Ahura Mazda, the Bountiful Immortals, and all other spirit beings to the liturgy. (Yasna.1.Iff)

3. A paraphrase of passages in the *Bundahishn* (pars. 3-7); see Anklesaria 1956:39.

4. Notice that the bull's hair is not an example of the principle of Good Intention directly, as the fire is of right Order. This further illustrates that the fire is a central symbol in the Zoroastrian tradition.

In addition, several times during the ceremony, the priest utters the confession of faith (*travatane*), which is, in part:

I profess myself a Mazda-worshiper, a Zoroastrian. . . . To Ahura Mazda, the good, rich in treasures, I ascribe all things good. . . . (Yasna.12.Iff)

Also, throughout the Yasna, the priest repeatedly utters the Avestan phrase *ashem vohu* ("righteousness is good") and praises good thoughts, words, and deeds.

Such phrases and sentences have cognitive significance since they express basic elements of traditional Zoroastrian beliefs. In fact, the word *madhuna* means "instrument of thought" (see Boyce, 1975; 1982:8). As such, the phrases and sentences constitute an important but non-exceptional part of that dimension of the ritual we have called "meaning space." However, when these phrases are spoken in the course of ritual enactment, they are not accurately defined as *primarily* propositions with informational content. Because it is language uttered in a sacred place, the *pathi*, it becomes more than propositional. It becomes sacred language, the speaking of which has a performative power that, among other things, helps situate the participant in a separate reality. In the Yasna, the declaration of *ashem vohu*, the praise of good thoughts, words, and deeds, and the profession of faith are not ways the priest has of merely talking about the ideas of righteousness and good conduct or of explaining to himself and others that he is a Zoroastrian. On the contrary, the liturgist is seeking to bring about the actual situation of personal and social righteousness, to take an ethical stance then and there. His statement that he is a Zoroastrian is less a cognitive assertion and more a *performative* utterance which is efficacious in helping him to be a Zoroastrian.⁵

1. DEFINITION

The performative character of sentences spoken in ritual settings has been extensively explored over the past decade. The idea that some forms of sentences, such as "I promise to do X," actually bring about that which they signify was announced first

5. This process of bringing about righteousness is related to exemplification, as remarked above. The priest is an example of purity; the ritual situation can thus exemplify purification.

by John Austin in his book *How To Do Things with Words* (1962). His theory was expanded by John Searle (1969) and has been applied to ritual studies by Wade Wheelock (1980, 1982) and others. We will review the notion of performative utterance in order to clarify its role in the Yasna and relate it to virtual space. Austin's original idea was that sentences such as those beginning with "I promise," "I bet," "I invite," and "I do (marry you)" are not true or false descriptions of external events or internal resolutions, but instead constitute the doing of something (e.g., promising, inviting, marrying). More precisely, to make such an utterance is to perform the action in question, *provided that* the speaker is properly qualified and the requisite circumstances are fulfilled.

A convincing example of the importance of such circumstances is provided by the marriage ceremony. Saying "I do" results in marriage only if, for example, the presiding official is of the appropriate kind (a priest, judge, etc.), and only if there is a valid marriage license, the parties are unmarried, and the correct vows are recited (Austin 1962: lecture 2). In his earliest account, Austin divided these necessary contextual features into two groups: those that have to do with whether the intended action (e.g., marrying) is actually carried off and those that have to do with such ethical features as sincere intention and the subsequence of doing of one's duty. Failures in the latter instances he called *abuses* of the ritual. To abuse the ritual is to succeed in performing the act albeit unethically—for example, to recite the marriage vows while intending not to keep them. Failures in the former ways Austin called *misfires*. To misfire is to fail to perform the act, as is the case, for example, if one tries to marry while already being married. Performative utterances made when all the required conditions are satisfied Austin called *felicitous* utterances. In sum, performatives can be infelicitous in a number of ways: linguistically (saying the marriage vows incorrectly), legally (failing to have a license), and ethically (insincerely stating the vows).

2. APPLICATION

This insight that performative utterances are actions, given the requisite context, can be illuminatingly applied to the manthric recitation of the Yasna. When both priests recite "I invite . . .," the performative action will be felicitous—i.e., the

invitation will actually have been proffered—only if a number of conditions, linguistic, legal, and ethical, hold. Thus, on pain of the ritual's misfiring or, as Dastur Kotwal says, "becoming vitiated," the *manthra* has to be correctly chanted (with all that this entails), and both men have to be qualified priests and in good health. In addition, of course, the ceremony has to be procedurally correct and conducted in an unpoluted, consecrated ritual space. A vivid example of misfire is the requisite presence of the hairs from a living bull. If the bull were to die, the ceremony would be vitiated and the ritual would immediately be stopped. Abuse of the ritual would occur, for example, if the priests were not devoted, disciplined, and principled persons.

One possible implication of our discussion of the importance of virtual space in ritual situations is that we must add aesthetic criteria to Austin's list of linguistic, legal, and ethical conditions in order to account more accurately for the role of performative utterance in the Yasna specifically and in ritual generally. The point can be demonstrated by explicating a statement made by Dastur Kotwal concerning the bearing of the officiating priest:

It is because the recitation of the *manthras* requires a high degree of attentiveness that the ideal priest must strive to become *pahntegār*, one whose conduct and manner is disciplined and exact, one who abstains from and avoids the superfluous and insensate. (Kotwal and Boyd 1977:38)

It is plausible that "superfluous" and "inessential" are aesthetic categories, evidence of aesthetic constraints on the performative efficacy of the manthric recitation. That is, one who fulfills the ethical/aesthetic criterion of avoiding the superfluous and insensate is one who can properly attend to the performance of the liturgy. Such attentiveness and disciplined conduct and manner are necessary for the "artful" conduct of the performative act. One will recall from our discussion of virtual space in drama that if the actors fail to create a viable virtual space, the performance, reduced to its physical and meaning spaces, becomes a mere counterfeited. This makes plausible our view that in the

6. *Pahntegār* is a Parsi Gujarati term used to refer to pious Zoroastrians.

Yasna also, in the absence of the creation of a viable virtual space, the liturgical performance will be essentially compromised (either abused or vitiated), and the proffered invitation will therefore be infelicitous.

C. WORD SOUNDS

1. MANTHRIC CHANT

Though the Avestan text when read abounds in mythological, theological, and devotional meanings, when it is heard as manthric chant, our attention is drawn away from meaning space to the physical sounds themselves. The facts that Avestan and Pāzand are not in daily use, that some passages are deliberately muted, that no connected logical structure is immediately apparent, and that the text is *chanted* contribute to this shift to the realm of sound. On the subject of manthric recitation, Dastur Kotwal asserts:

"... *manthras* by themselves, ... as printed or unuttered words, are dead things. They do not contain ... inherent power ... when abstracted from the verbal act of reciting them ... The manner of recitation by the priest is also important. While chanting the ... [liturgy], the [priest] must recite the holy words with utter devotion and attentiveness. He must concentrate and engross himself in the speech itself, not in the conceptual meanings given the Avestan words in interpretative translations. (Kotwal and Boyd 1977:37-38)

During the recitation of the liturgy, the priest's total concentration is on the proper voicing of the word-sounds; the conceptual meanings of the phrases and sentences are not in the forefront of his consciousness. [The intoned language is neither immediately comprehended nor reflectively considered by the speaker.] Rather, [manthric speech requires surrender to the speech act itself.] Given this, we may surmise that a number of things happen when the priest listens to or repetitively recites well-known phrases. Ordinary intellectual curiosity for new ideas is slowed, for the information content is already known, and repetition dulls the discursive intellect. In consequence, it is possible that the intoning priest would temporarily cease to be trapped within the ordinary conceptual framework—the "laby-

rith of words ... and inherited ideas that fester there"—and become more receptive to the sound of the *mantra* (Barrett 1979:301-2).⁷

That the sounds capture one's attention is due in no small measure to the seductive lure of purely auditory virtual space. The situation is akin to that of other artful uses of spoken language such as poetry, singing, and storytelling. Language so used has its own virtual space as well as physical space. A spoken word is a physical event, and the virtual space created is like that in music—a pure and mysterious sound space which is experienced as separate and real. But the sound space of manthric chant is not structured like that of a musical score. It is more like the simple, direct bell-sound of the mortar, unmediated by a prior structure. One's attention is drawn to the *physical* sound space of a language abstracted from its cognitive meaning, or better, not yet confined to particular meanings. It is as if one enters a fluid realm of language-like sounds pregnant with potential meaning, as if one has arrived at a source of meaning deeper than any particular articulation. These sounds without sense have their own noetic function. The priest/listener moves into a perceptual state less bounded by convention and allowing for new insights and shifts in meaning. We will elaborate on these ideas in chapters 7, 8, and 9.

2. MEANINGFULNESS

One further point. There are striking similarities between Kotwal's statement about manthric chant and Frits Staal's view about the "meaninglessness" of ritual, quoted in chapter 1. The two agree, in Staal's words, that "the performers are totally immersed in the proper execution of their complex tasks" and "concentrate on ... recitation and chant." They also agree that for the performers "there are no symbolic meanings going through their minds when engaged in performing ritual."⁸ Clearly, Staal has identified several important aspects of ritual performance. He has warned us not to assume that the significance of ritual lies in its symbolic meanings, but rather to recognize its intrinsic value and turn our attention to the

7. See also Clothey 1983: chap. 1, for a discussion of the role of sonority in ritual.
8. See above, p. 11.

practice itself in an attempt to articulate the "grammatical" rules which govern it.

However, we do not agree with Staal when he claims that it is an "erroneous assumption" that ritual "consists in symbolic activities which refer to something else." We have emphasized that rituals are complexes of physical, virtual, and meaning spaces. In this regard, Dastur Koiral insists that the Avesta has "lofty meanings," as well as "effective power and miraculous influence." He denies that "Zoroastrians have no regard for . . . the meanings of Avestan words, or that they prefer just to utter meaningless sounds" (Koiral and Boyd 1977:50, n. 54). In contrast to Staal, who calls for a grammar of ritual and denies that there can be a semantics, we have argued that the Yasna is rich in semantic connections, that there are levels of exemplification, expression, performative utterance, and modeling. Further, we have shown in detail that the priests' concentration on the specifics of the ceremony, far from being an end in itself, serves as a means to performative efficacy. From our point of view, Staal shares with some formalists in aesthetics the mistake of treating a means as an end. We have tried to do justice to the intrinsic value of ritual practice itself, its physical and virtual aspects, while at the same time emphasizing its role in the creation and expression of meaning.

A SYSTEM OF INTERNAL RELATIONS

It is time now to ask how the physical, meaning, and virtual spaces of authentic ritual are related. The examples from drama, painting, architecture, and dance suggest that they in-form each other in very significant ways. Physical space when "imbued" with virtual space exhibits new powers: the sword fight in the play becomes a "real" one, and the dragon seems to move of its own volition. Likewise, meaning space, when it "intersects" virtual space, takes on a heightened significance: the "living" dragon signifies the wondrous creature so much more completely than, say, the word "dragon," which conventionally refers to the same beast. Very roughly put, virtual space endows physical space with energy and mystery and at the same time serves as a vehicle of meaning, a signifying sign. To say that these spaces intersect, inform, and interact with each other is a first step toward conceiving their complex interrelationships. But further analysis is called for.

A. AN ATOMISTIC VIEW

One way to conceive of the interaction of these spaces is to think of them as independent, externally related parts or "atoms" which are combined to form the whole which is the ritual or artwork. A is *externally related* to B if A maintains its identity independently of the relation. For example, "to the left of" is an external relation: Bill, while he remains who he is, can be to the left of Alice at one time and not at another time. The relation effects no essential change in the objects so related. Further, an explanation is *atomistic*, if a whole is explained in terms of its parts. The characteristics of a building are determined by the physical qualities of the bricks. The parts are taken to be independently real, whereas the whole has a secondary reality because its features can be entirely accounted for in terms of the properties of the bricks (atoms) and their arrangements.

This way of looking at things is second nature to us. It assumes that the various ritual spaces complement each other the way all things seem to relate—namely, as separate aspects of units which, when externally related, make up the whole ritual. The Zoroastrian priest intones *mantra* while making prescribed gestures in physical space which are part of a symbolic universe of meanings, their combination creating a virtual space which is experienced as a separate reality. The physical, virtual, and symbolic dimensions of the ritual are viewed as the real units of activity and meaning. Their combination is the ritual performance. That one's analysis of ritual can proceed some distance with this approach is evidenced by the success we had at the outset in defining the spaces independently of one another.

B. A HOLISTIC VIEW

1. DEFINITIONS

Ritual may more productively be viewed, however, as a system of internal relations. It is the ritual in its cultural context that is the independently real object of study. Its parts, such as the various spaces, are to be understood by appealing to that whole. An explanation is *holistic* if the parts are explained in terms of a whole. The whole is real, and the parts, which are provisional entities abstracted from the whole, have only secondary reality. Since their properties are to be accounted for in terms of the nature of the whole and their relationships to it, they are *internally related* to that larger context. In general, A is internally related to B if A would not be the entity it is in the absence of the relation; that is, A would be essentially changed if it ceased to be related to B.

2. EXAMPLES

An example of internal relations and holistic explanation is afforded us by the film *Amadeus* (Forman 1984). The emperor, trying to be a respectable music critic, suggests to Mozart that his composition "has too many notes." Mozart is dumfounded; to him, the composition is a seamless whole. This view seems correct. Good compositions are characterized by a kind of aesthetic *necessity* which we can sense more easily than we can analyze or explain. It is a peculiar kind of necessity, neither causal nor logical, for notes could, of course, be added to or subtracted

from the score without violating either the laws of nature or the grammar of Western classical music.¹ The point is rather that the rightness of individual notes is due to, or is to be understood in terms of, the character of the composition as a whole. It is not that the composition is good because it is composed of "good notes" rightly combined. To think of building a composition from its atoms by rightly combining them is to think of following rules of combination, a process which most often leads to merely academically correct pieces. In contrast, we justify the breaking of such rules by appeal to the wholeness of the whole.

Wittgenstein's view of language is another illustration of the holistic approach. He claimed that we cannot understand a word unless we understand the language to which it belongs. It is not, for example, that there are independent "meanings" existing in the world antecedently, to which an isolated word might refer. A word derives its significance from its relations to other words in the language. Similarly, understanding a language requires that we understand the "form of life" in which it is embedded; that is, it requires that we have mastered the complex institutions and behaviors of human society to which the language is integrally linked. Wittgenstein summarized his position by claiming that "if a lion could talk, we could not understand him" because the lion's form of life is so different from our own (1954: I, 19, 23 and 2, 223).

Notice that this perspective is diametrically opposed to atomistic views of language in which the meaning of a proposition is taken to be a function of the meanings of the words (atoms) of which it is composed. The meanings of these words, in turn, are claimed to be independently characterizable in some fashion—by indicating the entity to which the word refers, for example, or by claiming that words can be correlated with innate ideas, themselves viewed as independently existing mental entities.

3. APPLICATION

a. Physical Space. To take the holistic approach to ritual is to claim that the spaces are at least partly constituted by their relations to the whole—a whole which is the ritual in its cultural context, including the culturally defined search for and

1. Aesthetic rightness is explored further in chap. 6, pp. 72ff., below.

celebration of the sacred.² This is to say that the temple space, the liturgy, the actions of the priest, and the virtual aspects of the performance and sacred objects are reciprocal dimensions, internal to the larger context and having only a secondary reality in relation to that context. They would not be what they are if removed from the whole, even if all their measurable properties and appearances remained the same. An obvious example of this situation is that the mortar in daily use in the Yasna would be essentially changed if removed to a museum, even though all its physical properties would be unchanged.³

Another example of internal relation to context is the place in which the Zoroastrian high liturgy is consecrated. It is called a *pawi* or "pure place," which implies that the physical space is from the outset also a meaning space, a propositionally defined area. It never was just one more fragment of the mundane world. Or perhaps we should say that the physical space is to be experienced under a certain set of descriptions dictated by the ritual context: in addition to its being a space of certain dimensions and shape containing certain objects, it is, after consecration, a sacred space. Outside the consecrating ritual, a physically identical space would not be a *pawi*. So a description of the *pawi*

2. Though we will opt for a holistic account of ritual involving internal relations, it should be emphasized that some of the relations among the various spaces are external or at least not straightforwardly internal. In the simplest case of painting, the virtual space can be thought of as the appearance of the physical space (painted canvas). If the relation is that of object to its appearance—something like the relation of wine to its taste—it seems likely that each aspect could be independently described and that the same *appearance* might result from two different objects, so the appearance is not what it is just because of the relation it has to the object. Similarly, the relation between virtual space and meaning space is, in the simplest case, the relation between a sign and its referent or its sense. It is a matter of debate in philosophy of language whether each of these is internally related to the others. Indeed, these matters are too difficult to be gone into here. The main point to be made is that the various spaces are best thought of as being internally related to the ritual context as a whole, whether or not they are internally related to each other.

3. Some years ago, several American Indian tribes petitioned the Denver Art Museum for the return of some ritual objects on display there, on the grounds that they are not artworks but religious objects. The museum complied, even though according to modern formalistic aesthetic theory, any object put before an audience with the intention that it be aesthetically contemplated is thereby an artwork. Thus, what is not an artwork in the context of the tribal ritual is an artwork in the context of the museum and the contemporary aesthetic theory which defines the museum's role.

in terms of its dimensions and other ordinary physical properties is essentially incomplete.

b. Virtual Space. The virtual spaces in the ritual are likewise linked to the larger context and can be correctly identified only in terms of that whole.⁴ To take just one example from the complex set of relationships which create virtual space, consider the *appearance* of the fire as opposed to how it "really is" according to some standard physical description. We can ask, "Its appearance to whom?" The Zoroastrian answer will be something like, "Its appearance to one who can properly attend to the fire, one who has the requisite calm, or pure perception and understanding of the fire's import." So, again, the virtual space is in part defined by the larger cultural environment, particularly by the concept of purified perception.

c. Meaning Space. Finally, it is plausible to consider meaning space as essentially related to virtual space and to the overall context in complex ways. For example, it is commonplace to say that the technical terms in a scientific theory ultimately derive their meanings from their uses in the theory itself. Similarly, we will expect that the language used in the ritual takes its meanings from the larger religious context as well as from the virtual aspects of the performance. When the priest intones the Avestan phrase *ashem vohu*, "righteousness is good," there is a literal significance to the phrase which can be independently described. But when that same language derives its significance from a matrix of internal relations with virtual and physical space, embedded in the religious purposes of the culture, the utterance carries a different kind of meaning. Such interactions between virtual and meaning space will be explored in more detail in chapter 9.⁵

We have employed the concepts of internal relation and holistic explanation to characterize two relevant kinds of unity: (1) the internal relation between the elements of an artwork/ritual (e.g., notes, colors, gestures) and the work or performance as a whole (our example was the "aesthetic necessity" of Mozart's music); and (2) the internal relation of the three spaces to the

4. Virtual spaces rather than space, because ritual performances may involve several artistic media—visual, dramatic, musical, dance, architectural.

5. See also below, p. 98.

ritual (artwork) as a whole, particularly to its governing purposes (e.g., the search for the sacred). These concepts will allow us now to indicate how the Yasna is both an integrated and an integrating whole.

INTEGRATIVE CONTEXTS

Chapter 5

A. UNIFYING CONTEXTS

The multifaceted nature of ritual is well summarized by Richard Schechner:

Many rituals integrate music, dance and theater. The display of masks and costumes, the processions, . . . singing, dancing, story-telling, food-sharing, fire-burning, incensing, drumming and bell-ringing create an overwhelming synaesthetic environment and experience for the audience. . . . At the same time, rituals embody cognitive systems of values that instruct and mobilize participants. These embodied values are rhythmic and cognitive, spatial and conceptual, sensuous and ideological. (1987:13)

It is this complexity as instantiated in the Yasna liturgy that we have attempted to reveal in detail by analyzing each aesthetic medium into physical, virtual, and meaning spaces. Now it is appropriate to summarize and integrate these features, to suggest how the many facets combine to serve the larger purposes of the ritual. To do so, we will turn to comments about a ritual distant from the Yasna in time, place, and intention.

In his essay "The Magical Power of Words," S. J. Tambiah interprets two Trobriand ritual sequences and makes some provocative claims about the role and effects of ritual in Trobriand life. The practices in question are associated with practical activities—canoe building and gardening—and both display a regular alternation between ritual and technological activity. For example, a ritual precedes the cutting of a tree, then another before the tree is scooped out to make the canoe hull, and so on. Tambiah resists attributing to the Trobrianders naively false beliefs about the efficacy of magic, and he resists as well the positivistic reduction of ritual to mere emotive display. Speaking of Malinowski's ground-breaking explanations of these rituals, Tambiah says:

Malinowski illuminatingly argued that magic signals, inaugurates and regulates systematic work. But . . . he argued narrowly that magic is a product of man's limitations of thought, of gaps in his empirical knowledge, that it is objectively absurd but has a subjective pragmatic rationale as an anxiety-queller. He thus reduced a highly formalised and structured system to the spontaneous expression of emotion with no intellectual content. (1988:200)

In contrast, Tambiah insists that

. . . the expanded meaning of the magical ritual [is] an imaginative, prospective and creative understanding of the very technological operations and social activities the Trobrianders are preparing to enact . . . I am not merely stating that the . . . [ritual] provides incentives to work—though that is a part of the matter. More importantly it is a blue-print and self-fulfilling prophecy and embodies for the Trobriander an understanding of the technical, aesthetic and evaluative properties of his activities, in a manner denied to us in our segmented civilization. . . .

Thus it is possible to argue that all ritual, whatever the idiom, is addressed to the human participants and uses a technique which attempts to re-structure and integrate the minds and emotions of the actors. (1968:200, 202)

Here ritual is pictured as a complex device for setting in a larger context important community activities such as cultivation and canoe building. The ritual helps the community to understand the activity; it provides an analogical model, which Tambiah referred to as a blue-print, for the stages of gardening or canoe building. Further, this larger context is in part evaluative, locating the activity in a hierarchical set of values. The ritual is an artful performance as well; it can engage the feelings of the participants and lend grace to their technical activities; and, of course, the ritual places the activities in a religious perspective.¹

1. Tambiah says that the ritual embodies an understanding of the technical, aesthetic, and evaluative properties of the activities, in a manner denied to us in our segmented civilization (1968:202). Whether and to what extent we are denied these things is no doubt open to debate, but what is certain is that the firm divisions our culture makes between scientific, religious, aesthetic, and evaluative discourses make more difficult an integrative vision. Ours is the post-Nietzschean

Given Tambiah's account, as we wish to generalize it, ritual reveals our activities to be comprehensible, right, aesthetically pleasing, and, let us say, acceptable to the spiritual beings. This is strikingly analogous to the traditional view of philosophy as discourse about the True, the Good, the Beautiful, and the Sacred. It is by means of ritual that we seek to provide for ourselves an integrating vision so that we can see particular activities and conflicting demands as aspects of a harmonious whole which is our "form of life."² Alongside such creative activities as technology, science, and the arts, we must place the subtle, contextualizing arts of ritual practice. As human beings, we are both the inventors of technical activities *and* the creators of the contexts which rationalize, harmonize, and justify such activities. Such integrating visions empower us anew to carry out the tasks in question, particularly since they involve the participants in action, in deed as well as word, and prefigure actions to come. That Zoroastrians see ritual practice as an instrument for setting in context everyday activities is evident in this statement by Dastur Kotwal:

Religious discipline teaches you to regulate life. . . . While sitting, standing, washing, eating or drinking, a Zoroastrian has to keep in front of him God and religion. . . . religious practice produces excellent influences on the everyday life of a Zoroastrian. (Boyd 1976)

B. ART'S CONTRIBUTION TO RITUAL

1. ARTISTIC MEANS

We asked at the outset what it is about the arts which makes them fit vehicles for religious expression. We are now in a position to see that artistic means are necessary to achieve the complex yet integrative environments we have been discussing. Rituals aim at harmonizing disparate elements of culture and

world of competing perspectives, an age of distinctions and hence of divisions. In such an age, a ritual which harmonizes religious, ethical, technical, and cosmological views would be extraordinary.
2. See above, p. 47, for Wittgenstein's phrase. Our discussion of context setting, noetic function, and the contemporary search for meaningful ritual finds parallels in Clothey 1983:chap. 1. However, his typology of "ritual spaces" is quite different from our own concepts of "spaces."

expression; they affect both our minds and hearts, rationalizing our activities and empowering us to act. And since these rituals bring together diverse realms of experience—ethical, aesthetic, technical, religious—mirroring our activities and expressing our inner emotional life in voices ranging from descriptive to evaluative, worshipful, and performative, they are necessarily complex and multivalent.

That only the arts can do this follows from the nature of artistic "languages," which allow complex, multi-leveled kinds of modeling and subtle expressions of feeling.³ The suitability of artistic languages for these tasks depends in part on the interactions among physical, virtual, and meaning spaces we have attempted to describe. In contrast to the languages of science, which obey Aristotle's law of non-contradiction, the languages of the arts, relying on metaphor and ambiguity, are fit for the display and resolutions of tensions and contradictions.⁴ How artworks accomplish this, though difficult to describe with precision, has been the subject of a long tradition of philosophical inquiry. But in the end, one must attend to the artwork or ritual itself to experience it as a unified whole. This mysterious dimension lies beyond description. What is clear is that authentic ritual performances, like masterpieces in the arts, are achievements of the highest order.

2. IRREPLACABILITY

Though we have been highlighting the instrumental function of ritual as context setting, we want to reiterate that rituals are intrinsically valuable and do what they do in ways irreplaceable. We subscribe to the view that sign systems cannot be prided apart from the "reality" they describe, and therefore, as Goodman and Jennings argue, the languages of science and art are both "ways of worldmaking," ways of "constructing and constructing" our world. It follows that what the ritual expresses, using the languages of the arts, constitutes a reality distinguishable from that expressed by the propositions of sacred texts and theology. Further, for ritual priests like Dastur Kotwal, ritual is the

3. For another example of the ways in which artworks can model (mirror) various aspects of our culture and activities, see Williams 1982.
4. The figurative dimension of the "languages" of art is a primary topic in part two, below, particularly chaps. 7, 8, and 9.

fundamental way of creating and comprehending our world. In his words,

The real coherence is in ritual. Doctrine is a secondary thing. Ritual is the master key that can unlock doctrine. However, ritual does not exist by itself. One cannot exist without the other. (Boyd 1976)

C. THE YASNA REVISITED: CELEBRATING THE INTERCONNECTION OF ALL GOOD THINGS

We have claimed that ritual activity, employing the integrative languages of the arts, sets ordinary action in a larger descriptive, ethical, aesthetic, religious environment. With these general perspectives in mind, we will pay a final visit to the Yasna. To remind the reader, the Yasna ceremony situates the participants in the context of a cosmic struggle, the battle between good and evil. All creatures of the good creation are enlisted in the battle, and their roles are defined by this overarching purpose. They are cooperatively interconnected in the task of pure, righteous activity (see Choksy 1987). In terms of our former categories, all creatures are *internally related*; that is, they are what they are in light of this broader purpose. Thus, the more specific context, the ritual establishes is one not only of purity and righteousness, but also of *interconnection* (Pahlavi: *paywand*). A brief exploration of the ritual expression of this connectedness of all things will allow us to tie together the many aesthetic features we have described and to suggest why the Yasna is an achievement of the highest order.

1. TEMPORAL CONNECTION

The cosmic struggle between good and evil takes place in time. Temporal duration enters into the Yasna in several ways. In terms of physical time, the two-and-one-half-hour ceremony is repeated daily, linking past with future and underlining the importance of ritual activity. With respect to meaning space, the link with the past is forged by the many references within the ceremony to Zarathushtra and the tradition. The link to the future involves cosmological time. Human actions take place in finite time, which is a bridge (*paywand*) to the future period of boundless time when Ahura Mazda's power will reign supreme.

It is largely through cooperative ritual acts that finite time is advanced toward that goal when evil is defeated and all is "made wonderful" (Avestan: *frashgird*).

But it is virtual time which lends to these ideas a sense of direct experiential reality. Such aesthetic elements as the static visual space, the sound space of the manthric chant, and the deliberate and concentrated movements of the priests combine to create dramatic virtual time. We can surmise that when the ritual is experienced by a completely attentive participant, this sense of special present duration heightens the perception of mundane physical time while affording a glimpse of boundlessness, unconditioned time. The participant is connected not only with his tradition and present activity but with the immense cosmic process.

2. GESTURE AND PHYSICAL CONNECTION

Throughout the Yasna, the officiating priest maintains contact with the *barsom*, a bundle of metal wires symbolizing connection between the mundane and the spiritual realms. As the ritual proceeds, more and more physical connections are made. At one point, for example, the priest holds the residue of the pounded *hom* twigs against the pestle and touches it to the *barsom*, to the metal cups containing water, and then to the ritual table. These gestures derive their emotional power from the gestural virtual space of the physical act of touching and from the fact that each element touched *exemplifies* a realm of being in the macrocosm. Dramatically, the priest becomes a conduit through which the cooperative relation of the creatures of the good creation is re-established.

The two priests are connected as well, both physically and symbolically. They are related, for example, by the powerful glance, by the antiphonal structure of the manthric chant, and, near the conclusion of the ceremony, by an elaborate priestly handshake. The latter gesture is further reinforced by the meaning space, for during the handshake they both utter the performative phrase in Pāzand: "May you be united in strength with all righteous ones" (*hamazār hamā asho bed*). Finally, the climactic gesture of the entire liturgy is the carrying of the consecrated *hom* drink from the immediate ritual area through several rooms

to a well. The purified liquid is thus connected to the well-water, which exemplifies all the waters of the world.⁵

3. SEAMLESS COMPOSITION

In terms of visual virtual space, the ritual elements are like sculptures, which impress the eye by asserting their physicality and individuality. Yet at the same time, the ritual area presents itself as a unified structure, as an abstract Persian composition in which each object is internally related. Compositionally, then, the area becomes an indivisible whole, a model of the interconnectedness of things. This perception is reinforced by the physical sound space of the manthric chant, which unifies by enclosing all ritual activities with sacred language, just as the *paav* is contained within ideal, invisible walls.

4. A MESSAGE IN MANY VOICES

Even so brief a list of ritual activities is enough to indicate that in the Yasna, gestural, temporal, visual, and auditory dimensions of the three basic spaces are skillfully blended to represent and convey feelings of cooperative and essential connection. Using the language of communication theory, we can say that considerable redundancy is employed to communicate a single message on many channels. In a multitude of voices, the ritual whispers connectedness. It is essential both that the voices be several and that they be integrated into a coherent, unified "artwork" exhibiting aesthetic "necessity." The different aspects of the ritual speak to different senses and affect different portions of the psyche, so that their unification brings about a unification in the perceiver—yet another way in which the ceremony communicates interrelationship. This brings us again to the noetic function of the Yasna: the participant comes to *know*, in ways not reducible to propositional expression, that he is cooperatively engaged with the creatures of the good creation. He experiences a *fell unity*, compelling to both heart and mind.

One who knows this lives in a different world.

5. Darrow (1988) considers the pouring of the purified *hom* into the well the dramatic climax of the entire liturgy. All meanings of prior acts are connected to this act.

Part Two

RITUAL KNOWLEDGE

Three companions for you:
Number one: what you own.
He won't even leave the house for some danger
you might be in.
He stays inside.
Number two: your good friend.
He at least comes to your funeral.
He stands and talks at the gravesite, no further.
The third companion: what you do.
Your work goes down into death to be there with
you, to help.
Take deep refuge with that companion beforehand.

—RUMI

TWO STANCES TOWARD RITUAL REPETITION

... ritual is not unwavering by nature, but adaptive. . . .

—THEODORE JENNINGS
"On Ritual Knowledge"

... if anything is likely to change, it is not ritual. . . .

—DASTUR KOTVAL

A. INTRODUCTION

1. A DEBATE ABOUT REPETITION

In part one, we sought to show the relevance of aesthetic categories to several questions being addressed in ritual studies. Treating the Zoroastrian high liturgy, the Yasna, as a complex artwork, we attempted first to distinguish and then to reintegrate its physical, imagistic, and semantic features in order to account for its efficacy and uniqueness.

In that discussion, some preliminary comments were made regarding the noetic function of ritual. Our present goal is to explore more thoroughly the topic of ritual knowing, continuing to use aesthetic categories and drawing upon examples from literature and the Zoroastrian tradition. The concepts and methods described in part one form the background for, and the first stage of, the more complex analysis to follow.

In the nascent field of ritual studies an important disagreement is beginning to emerge. It concerns the invariance of ritual practice, which is both a historical and a definitional issue. Our interest is the relation of this question to ritual's noetic function. Roy A. Kappaport, in "The Obvious Aspects of Ritual," reassesses the long-standing assumption that invariance is an essential feature of ritual practice. He defines ritual as "the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not encoded by the performers" (1979:175), and traces the fundamental contributions of invariance to the many aspects of liturgical orders. More recently, writers like Theodore

The next chapter will elucidate the noetic function of ritual repetition according to the second stance. Our argument begins with the fact that rituals are typically repeated more or less unchanged over long periods of time. Considering primarily the relation between the ritual and its practitioner(s), the question is: how is it possible for the celebrant to acquire knowledge new to the tradition by continued reenactment of the same ceremony? Consonant with our perception of rituals as akin to artworks, this question becomes: how can one acquire knowledge via continued exposure to a particular piece of art? We will treat certain elements of the ritual as figurative images whose nature can be illuminated by theories of metaphor. This will provide the interpretive categories for delineating the noetic function of ritual repetition.

In chapter 8, the argument will be carried a step further by means of a literary example: Sartre's novel *Nausea*, a fictional diary. It is a daily record of changes undergone with respect to a repeated ritual, and will furnish the details necessary for the proper understanding of the interpretive categories which characterize the second stance. This, in turn, will permit the application of the categories to a Zoroastrian ritual in chapter 9. There, the focus is on a ceremony of blessings, the Afrinagan, and on Dastur Koival's comments about the role of unchanging rituals. Chapter 10 is a summary and the completion of our argument that, from the perspective of the second stance, ritual repetition is necessary for the acquisition of knowledge.

3. THE FORM OF THE ARGUMENT

It will become evident that Jennings takes change in ritual practice to be *necessary* for the generation of new knowledge. To develop a contrary perspective, we need show only that it is *possible* for an unchanging ritual practice to be a tool for the acquisition of knowledge new to the tradition. Consequently, most of the rather complex argument to follow has the form of a "how possibly" explanation.

W. Jennings (1982), Ronald L. Grimes (1988), Richard H. Davis (1988), and Brian K. Smith (1989) have lamented any such view, taking it to be a retreat from history and possible evidence of buying into the illusions of many practitioners who maintain that some features of ritual do not and must not change. For example, Grimes disapproves of the "widespread assumption—even among scholars—that ritual traditions don't change much . . ." (1988:288), and Jennings emphasizes the historical variations in liturgical practices and claims that change is essential to the noetic function of ritual (1982:111–27; 1987:46). Before this more recent view becomes too entrenched, we wish to advance a position which gives due weight to the importance of ritual invariance for the acquisition of new knowledge while recognizing the fact of historical change. We hope that rather than falling prey to the illusion of the practitioners, we will adequately illuminate their practice. By entering this debate, we are responding to an invitation issued by Jennings, who—in his essay "Ritual Studies and Liturgical Theology: An Invitation to Dialogue"—calls for a broadly interdisciplinary discussion of theories of ritual. He states, "differences in the rhetorical definition of ritual are not only to be expected but welcomed" (1987:51). It will become apparent that these differences also involve important issues of method which we will address in chapters 10 and 11.

2. PLAN

The present chapter delineates two different stances toward ritual repetition. The first stance, developed by Jennings in his essay "On Ritual Knowledge" (1982), argues the position noted above: that rituals are not to be characterized by their unchanging repetition but by the important variations they undergo. Variation is the key to their noetic function. The second stance is represented by Dastur Firoze Koival, the Zoroastrian high priest with whom we have been studying.² He finds the repetitive enactment of *unchanging* rituals to be essential to their knowledge-gaining function.

1. See Davis 1988:39, and B. Smith 1989:222.
2. More accurately, the second stance is our interpretive model of the ritual practice of Dastur Koival.

Though the traditional conception of ritual is that it is in some sense essentially repetitive, typically this feature has not been related to ritual's noetic function. Our argument seeks to explore this relation. It could not take the form it does here except in contrast to Jennings's provocative and cogently argued opposing position.

B. JENNINGS'S VIEW OF THE NOETIC FUNCTION OF RITUAL

1. RITUAL AND KNOWLEDGE

Jennings contends that ritual action is a way of gaining

knowledge, "a means by which its participants discover who they are in the world and 'how it is' with the world" (1982:113).

Changes in the structure and content of rituals are evident in the initial stages of invention, and a close look at rituals historically and cross-culturally offers evidence that they continue to change and are not to be characterized as merely repetitious. Jennings states:

A diachronic perspective on ritual, together with a cross-cultural comparison of putatively identical rituals, brings to light considerable variation which cannot be accounted for by the view of ritual action as sheer repetition. (113)

It is precisely this evidence of ritual change, Jennings continues, which makes possible "the view that ritual may be understood as a search for understanding of the world, as a mode of inquiry and of discovery" (113-14).

2. PEDAGOGY AND REPETITION

Whereas variation signals ritual's knowledge-gaining function, repetition is the way in which ritual transmits or "teaches" knowledge already gained; it is the pedagogical side of ritual knowing. By repeating the ritual, the participant learns the traditional knowledge it encodes, "knowledge gained elsewhere and otherwise" (114). But the *sui generis* noetic function of ritual is evidenced by change, not by repetition. Variation in ritual performance is the decisive clue to ritual action's being a relatively autonomous form of knowledge exploration and discovery.

3. ACTION

For Jennings, rituals are quests for appropriate actions; ritual knowledge is knowledge of action acquired through action, not by detached-reflective observation. One discovers how to perform a ritual not by observing it but by doing it, by engaging in the action itself. To use Jennings's example, discovering how to use an axe to chop firewood requires that one actually chop firewood. Engaging in the activity transforms a person into one who knows the activity.

4. KNOWING THROUGH THE BODY

Thus, for Jennings, ritual action is an exploratory form of knowing by being; knowledge gained by and through the body. He expands on this view in the following way: "It is not so much that the mind 'embodies' itself in ritual action, but rather that the body 'minds' itself or attends through itself in ritual action" (115). Take for example the ritual-like activity of dancing. In order to dance well, one does not first think through the appropriate action and then "perform" it; rather, there is a sense in which the feet "discover" the fitting step—it is indeed a knowledge gained by and through the body. One may then "ceremonially" *re-cognize* the step as appropriate or right, but that is a different form of knowing; it is to be distinguished from the knowledge gained by attending to and discovering the dance step itself. The same can be said, in principle, for the form of knowing involved in learning the ritual gestures in the celebration of a high liturgy such as the Eucharist.

Ritual knowledge for Jennings, therefore, is primarily active rather than contemplative, corporeal rather than cerebral, and transformative rather than speculative (115). As patterned actions, rituals perform noetic functions peculiar to themselves, i.e., are *sui generis*, because they are quests for newly appropriate, fitting actions. Such acquisition of knowledge is signaled by variation in the ritual itself, because a new, more fitting action has been found. What is learned is then transmitted via ritual repetition.

5. RITUAL AS PARADIGM

Jennings extends his model by claiming that such ritual action can serve as a paradigm for all other significant actions. The known action (traditional and transmitted) serves as the

field within which the quest for new fitting actions, within or without the restricted ritual context, can be undertaken (119). By learning a "fitting ritual act," one can then apply that knowledge to areas in life outside the ritual context, and seek for "fittingness" in relation to all other activities. Jennings extends this paradigmatic ritual action in two directions: to extra-ritual personal actions and to the "actions" or "rhythms" of nature. Ritual thus informs our way of being and acting in the world, and mirrors the way the world acts. This latter feature he calls ontological or cosmogonic.⁴

6. CONFIRMATION/DISCONFIRMATION

Because such actions are "fit" to be a paradigm for the world of action generally, the question of the truth or falsity of ritual action (hence, of ritual knowledge) can be raised. Jennings discerns in ritual "the presence of something like coherence and correspondence tests of adequacy" (119). The criterion of "fittingness" suggests a kind of aesthetic test of coherence: "does this act fit with other acts or gestures?" (119). In terms of correspondence tests of adequacy, he suggests that

a ritual is falsified to the extent to which it cannot serve as a paradigm for significant action outside the ritual itself and is validated to the extent to which it does function in this way. (119-20)

This criterion is more complex than the statement might suggest, but basically one must find "ways to display the correspondence of this action to diverse ways of being and acting in the world" (120). These are some of Jennings's ideas on the noetic function of ritual, and we will be commenting on them in detail. Most important for our purposes, initially, is his distinction between the pedagogical function of the unchanging aspects of ritual and the knowledge-gaining function which requires and is evidenced by variation in ritual. Ritual repetition, for Jennings, is fit only for the transmission of knowledge already acquired.

4. As an example of "actions" in nature, Jennings refers to spring rituals in some agrarian societies which "enact" the coming into being of the earth. Such ritual action seems to have an "ontological dimension of exhibiting the action or rhythm of reality" (1982:122).

C. JENNINGS ON THE NECESSITY OF CHANGE

If there were no variation in the ritual performance, we would have to conclude that there is here neither search nor discovery but only transmission and illustration of knowledge gained elsewhere and otherwise.

—Theodore Jennings
"On Ritual Knowledge"

We applaud Jennings's efforts to investigate rituals on their own terms, searching for an understanding of how ritual participants acquire knowledge in unique ways, and noticing variation in ritual practices as signs of ongoing investigation in search for new fitting actions.⁵

The logic of his position can be summarized in the following way. If *sui generis* knowledge is to be newly acquired *via* ritual performance, then:

- Change in the ritual performance must be admitted as *possible*, since it is necessary for knowledge-gaining.

- In fact, Jennings's theory would be compatible with rituals that *change regularly* and as often as the fitting actions are in need of revision—something like the way new styles emerge in the history of ballet, since ballet can also be viewed as a search for fitting action. It is relevant that he derived his view of ritual practice at least in part from the modern experimental theater (114, 117).

- Further, *change is to be expected*, insofar as we take seriously Jennings's analogy between ritual activity and scientific exploration as described by Thomas Kuhn (1962:119). In the case of science, a paradigm will focus attention on the facts relevant to the theory, so that any mismatch between the world and the theory will likely be noticed. This will lead to disconfirmation and emendation of some portions of the theory. Similarly, a ritual

- 5. An inquiry into just how rituals function noetically can proceed along any of several lines. For example, they can be viewed as an expression of community values, or as ways of dramatizing the theology of a tradition. Ritual may also be explored in its own right (not instrumental to something beyond itself), thus allowing the possibility of enacted rituals resulting in a special kind of knowledge. The present endeavor will focus on the latter approach—viewing rituals in their own right and entertaining the possibility of *ritual* knowledge. In this way, we fully concur with Jennings's approach.

will focus attention on a particular realm of action, and any mismatch between the paradigmatic ritual action and broader experience will lead to change in the ritual action.⁶

• In all these ways, therefore, *change* is the touchstone of knowledge in ritual activity in Jennings's view.

D. EVIDENCE FOR A CONTRARY POSITION:

DASTUR KOTWAL

No one has the right to change ritual. Our rituals are such that they have the backing of ancients, the support of the scriptures, and are efficacious in furthering souls. . . .

—DASTUR KOTWAL

Just as Jennings's cross-cultural studies and diachronic perspective on rituals led him to the view that change is the key to knowledge in ritual activity, our fieldwork with the Zoroastrian ritual priest Dastur Kotwal has revealed evidence for a contrary, more traditional position. As one of seven high priests living today, Dastur Kotwal is currently responsible for all liturgical celebrations in a major fire temple in Bombay, the Wadia Atash Bahram. His knowledge of the rituals in his tradition and his dedication to them make him an important source for an understanding of ritual repetition.

Dastur Kotwal maintains that the life of repeated ritual practice leads to increased knowledge of the righteous life. He concedes historical evidence of change in the rituals of the tradition, but as a ritual practitioner he is explicitly concerned

6. Pursuing this analogy, one should also remember that a scientific paradigm is "undetermined" by the facts—i.e., hypotheses go beyond their data base—so a paradigm will most likely contain "arbitrary elements." Likewise, there are apt to be "arbitrary elements" in the ritual actions. A limited number of ritual actions are being projected over a wider set of activities, extending even to ontological dimensions of reality. That disconfirmations will occur is likely or, at least, should be in no way surprising. For example, Newton's "Law of Gravity" postulates that *every* pair of particles in the universe behaves according to the formula. The data on which that claim is based are, of course, very few compared to all particles. Further, a theory is stated in terms of theoretical expressions like "force" or "electron," and though the theory yields correct predictions, there may be elements in it which later will seem arbitrary and dispensable, if not misleading. Such are the "arbitrary elements" Kuhn (1962; 1966:3ff.) mentions.

to transmit these rituals unchanged.⁷ Changes that have occurred, but because they were forced to change by circumstances" (Boyd 1989).⁸

Referring to Zoroastrian rituals, Dastur Kotwal says: "It is our duty to preserve them in their original condition." The goal for the practitioner of daily ritual is "spiritual advancement . . . to develop all virtues and then reach perfection." "Rituals," he says, "are useful for fulfilling the aim of life," which is "to know righteousness" (Boyd 1976). We infer from these and other remarks that unchanging ritual practice is thought to be an instrument in the gaining of increased wisdom and knowledge of right action.⁹ It is this double claim of knowledge gained and ritual unchanged that leads us to question Jennings's picture as a *full* explanation of ritual knowledge.¹⁰ We think we detect a different *stance* toward ritual practice adumbrated by the Dastur.

• In Jennings's view, the acquisition of ritual knowledge requires an openness to change, whereas Kotwal's position is that ritual knowledge requires a commitment to no change, in fact a *duty* to strict preservation. Hence Jennings's position would not be falsified by continual change in the ritual actions, whereas Kotwal's position would be compatible with a ritual practice which never changed.

7. Kotwal acknowledges some differences in certain Zoroastrian rituals from Parthian and Sassanian, to post-Sassanian times (Boyd 1989), and has written about specific changes in the qualifications of celebrant priests for certain ceremonies conducted outside the temple precincts (see Kotwal 1988:302, n. 15) as well as changes in the Zoroastrian high liturgy, the Yasna (see Kotwal and Boyd 1991:67, n. 26). Hence it is incorrect to suggest that those who argue for invariance have ignored historical change and are concerned only with present practices (see Jennings 1987:46–47).

8. For example, the fire vases in ancient Iran were made of stone but, due to the necessity of moving, are now made of metal. Likewise, the wooden twigs of *barsom* (possibly pomegranate or tamarisk twigs in former times) used in the high liturgies have been replaced by metal wires because of the lack of availability of such wooden twigs in India, according to Dastur Kotwal.

9. The philosophically controversial claim that there can be *knowledge* of righteousness will be assumed in this book rather than defended. Given that assumption, chaps. 8 and 9 illustrate ways in which ritual practice facilitates the gaining of such knowledge.

10. We are not suggesting that Jennings claims his account constitutes a full explanation. His explicit hope is that "many disciplines may contribute their own perspectives and lines of inquiry" (1982:111). See also Jennings 1987:35–56.

• Put differently, Jennings's theory pictures it as *accidental* that a ritual remains *unchanged* over a long period. Such stability means merely that it has been confirmed in the larger context and so need not be changed. His is something like Karl Popper's picture of scientific investigation: at a given moment, the hypotheses that constitute scientific theory are merely those that have yet to be disconfirmed. In contrast, Dastur Koral takes ritual action to be *essentially* unchanging, as we will see.

• Given Jennings's perception that change is the touchstone of ritual knowledge, the *commitment* to no change on the part of Koral (and more generally, on the part of many ritual practitioners) should be something of a mystery to him, even if the *fact* that rituals are sometimes left unchanged can be explained.¹¹ In any event, Koral's understanding and practice of ritual have been the spur leading us to ask if some processes other than those described by Jennings may not also be operating.

E. REPETITION AS THE ESSENCE OF RITUAL

In what follows, we use the phrase "ritual repetition" to refer to those practices involving rituals regularly repeated by practitioners specially trained to perform and transmit them precisely.¹² Such rituals seem to achieve a remarkable identity across vast stretches of time.¹³ This is an identity of actions, not necessarily of interpretation. Our question is, why are such rituals typically repeated?

11. Both Koral and Jennings acknowledge the "fact" of change in ritual over time, but whereas Jennings's position is amenable to a commitment to change, Koral's position is a commitment to no change.
12. It is also a feature of many rituals that certain elements are repeated within each ritual performance. In the ritual example introduced in the next chapter, the exchange of flowers between two priests is repeated three times. This kind of repetition may be due to a number of different factors, one being the formal aesthetic structure of the performance, another being the need to maintain the ritual's focus (see chap. 7). In any case, this will not be the central concern of the present discussion.
13. For example, in referring to the Zoroastrian high liturgy, the Yasna, Dastur Koral traces compelling evidence that something close to this liturgy has been performed for over three thousand years. During the last one thousand years, his conviction is, what changes have occurred in this liturgy have been minor (see Koral and Boyd 1991:ix).

An appropriate answer from within a tradition is often simply that this is the way it is and has always been, or that the occasions for the repetition of rituals were decreed by the ancestors or the deities. As a Zoroastrian, Dastur Koral makes this point emphatically when, in the statement quoted previously, he claims that no one has the right to change rituals which have the backing of the ancients and of scriptures.

But looking at this phenomenon from outside any particular traditional culture, we find that a different sort of answer seems appropriate. For we notice not only that repetition is common to rituals, but also that rituals have features similar to certain kinds of repeatable artistic performances. As we have argued, rituals contain elements parallel to the visual, performative, and literary arts.¹⁴ Dastur Koral agrees with this analogy, claiming that a "ritual is a masterpiece" (Boyd 1990).¹⁵ Hence, another type of response can be made to the question, why are rituals typically repeated? Just as unvarying repetition characterizes the presentation of many forms of artworks, so repetition may be an essential feature of ritual activity.

This leads us to delineate three salient characteristics of ritual practice as undertaken from the second stance. More precisely, each of the characteristics is a set of interrelated features or aspects reflecting the rather complex connections between ritual, practitioners, and context. These features are not definitive of ritual in general. Since we are explicating certain possible stances toward ritual, we will rely on the ordinary understanding of ritual in general, taking it to be a pre-theoretic, unanalyzed notion.

The three salient characteristics are in part repetitions of what has already been said about Dastur Koral's understanding of ritual. But they also go beyond what has been said, marking the first phase of the construction of our interpretive model for the second stance. Thus, these characteristics also function as interpretive hypotheses whose adequacy will be judged from the further insights they generate and the degree to which they are

14. Cf. Baraille 1954; 1988:11: "In all religions dramatization is essential." His remarks connect the urge to dramatize existence in order to reach ecstatic states with both the dramatic moment of death in sacrificial ritual and the later development of a dramatic art employed to heighten emotion.
15. For a fuller discussion of the relation of rituals to artworks, see part one.

borne out by the applications to the ritual situations and the priestly comments discussed in chapters 8, 9, and 10.

I. FIRST CHARACTERISTIC: THE AURA OF NECESSITY

Having noted the universality of ritual repetition and the parallels between rituals and artworks, we venture the following: *the very nature of ritual as it does to certain forms of artwork such as scored, classical concertos. First, this means that it is a constitutive principle of the institution of ritual activity (within the second stance) that rituals remain more or less unchanged over considerable periods of time.*¹⁶ Invariance is an oft-remarked feature of ritual, but here we wish to go further by emphasizing a feature of the rituals themselves: rituals possess an *aura of necessity*; they present themselves as that which should not be changed.¹⁷

These claims can be developed with reference to some relevant remarks by Elias Canetti in his discussion of myth in *The Conscience of Words*:

One quality of myths that are handed down orally is that they have been repeated again and again. Their vitality is like their definiteness; they are not destined to change. It is possible only in each individual case to find what makes up their vitality, and perhaps they have not been studied enough in terms of why they have to be repeated to others. . . . I only wish to mention one thing: the feeling of certainty and incontestability [which myths engender]. . . . (1976; 1979:244)

16. Our claim should not be mistaken for the following: It is necessary that rituals do not change. This latter position would commit one to saying that if a rite changes, it was not really a ritual to begin with.
17. Many different kinds of necessity appear to hover around ritual activity. Batelli, for example, takes ritual sacrifice (the removal of the object from everyday life) to be a necessary restoration of balance in a world in which everything is used and all actions are connected to project. He says, "A rite is a divining of a hidden necessity. . . ." (1954; 1988:137). In contrast, one may take a ritual to be ordained by God and consequently to have a necessary structure; or there may be moral pronouncements in the course of a ritual which are thought to have the necessity of "ought"; or rituals may be taken to be constitutive of some feature of community life and, thus, to be a priori in some sense. In contrast, our emphasis is on aesthetic rightness and on the necessity of the priest's commitment to invariance—a defining characteristic of the second stance.

Canetti then refers to the myths that have reached us as "a reservoir of unquestionability" which remains "free of doubt" (244).¹⁸

Appropriating his insights to our own topic, we wish to suggest that perhaps rituals have not been studied enough in terms of why they have to be repeated, and that it is a feature constitutive of some traditions that their rituals are not destined to change fundamentally. In fact, our ultimate claim will be that these rituals are meant not to change.
There is another hint in this passage worth pursuing. Canetti says there is a kind of necessity about myth (i.e., "certainty" and "incontestability"), which is another way of saying that myth is essentially unchanging. This insight promises a way further to articulate the second stance toward unvarying repetition in ritual.

The realm of necessity has traditionally been associated with constitutive *a priori* and logistic propositions, moral law, and aesthetic rightness.¹⁹ As we have noted, Zoroastrian ritual aims at growth in righteousness, so the necessity of moral obligation is very much at issue here. Rituals themselves, however, are not primarily sets of verbal moral commandments; at their best, they are aesthetically arresting and enigmatic visual/auditory performances. So, whatever kind of necessity is at issue theologically, it is *expressed* by means of the aesthetic rightness of the ritual as performance. Artworks, particularly profound ones, have about them a necessary, aesthetic rightness which precludes emendation. As indicated in chapter 4, the "parts" of a good artwork are internally related to the whole so that changes in any of them result in an essential change in the whole. One does not add or subtract notes to Mozart's compositions to improve them, nor does one alter the colors in a Matisse.

18. We are aware of the important discovery in our era that myths, folktales, and rituals do change significantly over time. Seeing the history of a myth as the history of an ever-changing process of deletion, addition, and rearrangement is one important perspective. At the same time, such stories and practices may possess an aura of necessity, and persons may approach them with the intention of leaving them unchanged. Such intentions are characterized in the remainder of part two.
19. We are not asserting that a priori propositions, logistic principles, statements of obligation, and the aesthetic rightness of an artwork are all necessary in the same way. "Aesthetic necessity" may even be a metaphor.

In summary, we have delineated two aspects of the essential nature of ritual repetition. The first is institutional: the practice is not a ritual unless it is performed more or less unchanged. The second concerns the internal organization of rituals: a ritual is so structured that it would cease to be the entity it is if that were amended beyond allowable limits. This is aesthetic rightness. These features lend to the ritual its aura of incontestability. This first characteristic, concerning the ritual itself and its context, quite naturally dictates the role of the practitioner: an appropriate response toward that which possesses an aura of necessity is one of protection or preservation.²⁰

2. THE SECOND CHARACTERISTIC: THE OBLIGATION TO PRESERVE

Turning, then, to the practitioner: the relation of a practitioner to a ritual is similar to that of a person to a masterpiece of art, in the light of which the person lives, learns, explores, and discovers. One feature of this relationship is that the practitioner seeks to maintain the ritual unchanged. The second stance is primarily characterized by the ongoing commitment of the practitioner(s) to perform and transmit the ritual unchanged.²¹

Commitment has to do with intention. Stance two is characterized by the practitioner's intention to engage in and transmit the ritual unchanged and to arrive at new knowledge in part because of that intention. The first stance is governed by a much different intention: to explore for fitting action by and through

20. It may seem strange to claim both that rituals have a necessary structure and that they *should not* be changed. Rituals are more like marriages (under the traditional view that marriages are sacred unions). The husband and wife are essentially altered when they enter into the relationship, and though the marriage can end in divorce, the separated partners will not be the persons they were before, having been again essentially altered. Hence, sacred marriages and (second stance) rituals are not like automobiles: a car can be modified in any number of ways and still be the same car; to modify a ritual beyond allowed limits is to destroy it.

21. That is, the ritual can be changed only in inessential ways and within limits. If in the performance of a scored symphony the second violinist misses a note, it is still the case that the symphony has been performed. Repetition of a scored piece of music allows for variations in personal performative style and may allow as well for certain kinds of improvisation. Of course, just when stylistic variation and improvisation amount to essentially changing the music is a matter that can be controversial. What is important is that one intending to perform the piece must intend to leave unchanged its essential features.

a changing ritual practice, or at least a practice open to change. How far such intentions are consciously and articulately held by ritual practitioners may vary.²²

What is important in all this as a way of separating the two stances is that the resulting distinction is only loosely tied to the historical question of whether, as a matter of fact, the ritual changes. For the ritual practiced from the first stance may remain unchanged, though the practitioner has no commitment to keep it static. Instead, he may not yet have found it necessary to amend the ritual act, or he may still be searching for a new way to carry it forward. Similarly, with respect to the second stance, the ritual may change in various ways while the commitment to keep it unchanged remains.²³

To make the point more dramatically, during a single performance of a ritual, the practitioner could have either of the two intentions described above. It is a matter of what task one is engaged in or sees oneself as being engaged in: exploration for fitting action via action, or exploration of virtue via a practice held constant. Change or the lack of it may be a symptom of the practitioner's intentions, but it is not simply and directly connected to the complex pattern of stance, commitment, motive, and intention.²⁴

There is another aspect to this second characteristic. The commitment to preserving the ritual unchanged is matched by the practitioner's willingness to change by means of the ritual; in the Zoroastrian case, this is a willingness to grow in righteousness. Since what is necessary does not change, if there is any mismatch between the necessary structure of an artwork/ritual and the performer/practitioner, it is the practitioner who is called upon to

22. Sometimes a person's intentions in doing something are apparent to an observer, even though the person himself might deny those intentions. Note that Jennings does not discuss the intentions of the ritual practitioners toward extended Jennings's view to develop two contrasting stances of practitioners toward their own ritual performance.

23. Just as, for example, one may be committed to the authentic practice of one's profession while sometimes falling short of the ideal.

24. Speaking in terms of commitment frees us, to a point, from the issue of historical change and its correct interpretation, but it introduces problems of its own with which we do not deal. Foremost among these are (1) the issue, mentioned above, whether the intentions must be consciously held, and (2) the issue of how to determine a practitioner's (real) intention. The Dastur is quite articulate about his intentions, a fact which helps in this particular case.

film about Jesus (*The Milky Way*), says:

which changes life . . . , would it not be necessary . . . to reach . . . a choice capable of constantly beginning again. . . ? (132-33)

which fosters deeper insight rather than interferes with it? For *right repentance* to occur, the practitioner would have to find a way constantly to "begin again," to look at the ritual afresh and never cease to see things it contains. On the side of

26. See Krishnamurti 1976:157 for an expression of the view that ritual activity is mind-deadening and an obstacle to true meditation. Sigmund Freud links our natural tendencies toward repetition, particularly compulsive repetition, to the death instinct rather than to the life-affirming pleasure principle (1920; 1962:20-24, 42-46, 62). Though his view is complex and admittedly tentative, it furnishes a good example of the criticism of ritual that is characteristic of our century. Freud correlates repetition with death, unchangedness, and our life-denying attempts to return to earlier stages in our lives.

change, not the artwork. This is particularly the case, of course, with moral law, the necessity of "ought."²⁵ Contrast this with the case of empirical statements, which more typically are themselves amended if they do not match "the facts." It is the empirical case which Jennings appears to have most in mind.

Consequently, when we speak of repentance as essential to ritual, we are not describing the practitioner as one who is trying to stand still in a world which is in process; it is, rather, that we are looking at change in a person with respect to an unchanging artwork/ritual which possesses aesthetic rightness and necessity. Canetti goes on in *The Consistence of Words* to describe his own relationship to the *Gilgamesh* epic: "I encountered it at the age of seventeen, it has not let go of me since then, I have returned to it as to a Bible . . ." (241). It is this relationship or set of possible relationships between persons and an enduring artwork that can serve to characterize the stance of the Dastur. In his words: "It is the man himself, and how he looks at these [rituals] that counts" (Boyd 1976).

Hence, the second characteristic explicates the practitioner's twin commitments: to preserve the ritual and to be open to change in oneself because of the ritual practice. Such openness is closely related to the priest's ability to approach repetitions of the ritual with fresh attention and, thus, to escape undue routinization. This is the focus of the third characteristic, which concerns both the attitude of the practitioner and the structure of the ritual.

3. THE THIRD CHARACTERISTIC: RIGHT REPETITION

To reach a repetition which saves, or which changes life . . . , would it not be necessary . . . to reach . . . a choice capable of constantly beginning again . . . ?

—GILLES DELEUZE
Cinema I

There is a long-standing debate on the merits of ritual repetition. On the one hand, ritual has been castigated as routine-

25. Rappaport (1979) makes a similar claim about how performative utterances create practices such that if an action is out of accord with a rule of practice, then the action must be changed rather than the rule amended. He does in the moral sphere what we do in the aesthetic sphere.

ritual itself, there would have to be something about it that fostered its being an horizon rather than an enclosure.

It is this last condition that especially interests us, particularly the notion of horizon. Horizons have a double nature: compared to uncharted space, the horizon centers us; it provides stability and reference. At the same time, a horizon is a lure to exploration and continually recedes as we pursue it. These aspects provide a necessary addition to our hypotheses. If interacting with repeated rituals is like living with a masterpiece of art, then the ritual must be Janus-faced: it would, on the one hand, have to instruct and pattern our behavior, acting like a stabilizing horizon, and on the other hand it would have to possess the power continually to lure us on and to recede from us, perhaps by defeating inadequate or premature interpretations or understandings of itself. Dastur Kotwal addresses these matters, we believe, when he states:

The ritual lives again and again. . . . When you approach it fresh, it is alive all the time. You learn something new, though you perform it hundreds of times. (Boyd 1989)

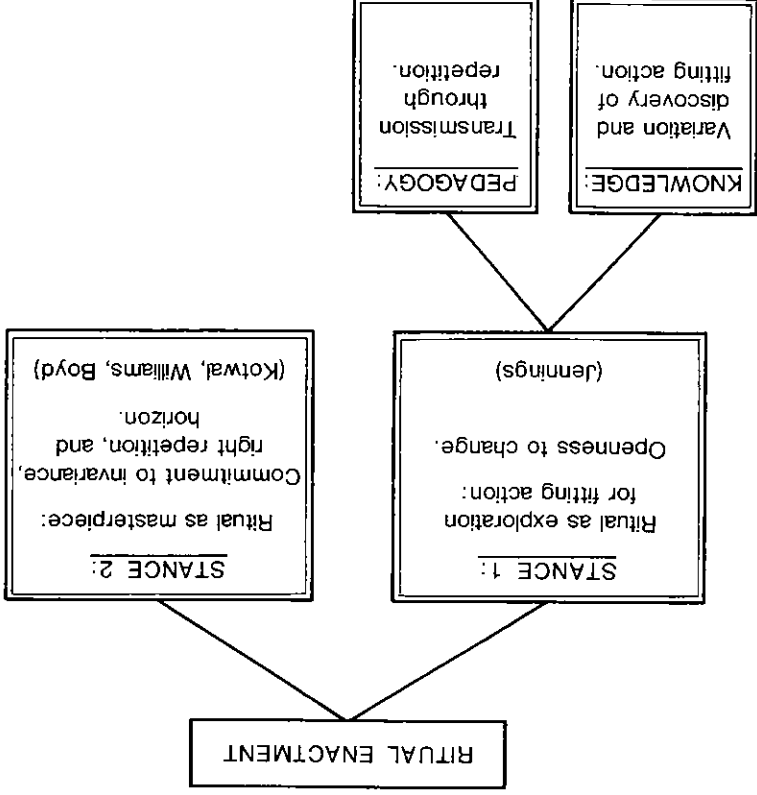
F. THE TWO STANCES SUMMARIZED AND CONTRASTED

To review, our hypotheses are that repetitive rituals can be pictured fruitfully as masterworks displaying aesthetic necessity, and that they are artworks which can function both as stabilizing patterns and as provocative lures to further exploration.²⁷ What, then, must it be like to acquire knowledge by living with a repeated ritual as artistic masterpiece?

- There will be a commitment to transmitting the ritual practice unchanged, just as there is in the case of certain masterworks of art.
- Repeated interaction between practitioner and ritual will result in changes in the practitioner rather than in the ritual.
- If the ritual is efficacious, the change will be an acquisition of knowledge (e.g., for Zoroastrians, knowledge of righteous living).

²⁷ We are not claiming that all repetitive rituals have a noetic function. It remains to be seen, on a case-by-case basis, which kinds of ritual are amenable to our theory. For an extensive typology of ritual, see Crimes 1982:43ff.

Diagram 1:
Two Stances Toward Ritual Practice



- The ritual practice will act as "horizon" in the double sense of providing stability and guidance while, at the same time, acting as lure and constantly receding goal.

Thus far, then, over against Jennings's notion of pedagogy, transmission, paradigm, and patterning by extension, we have introduced the ideas of masterpiece, living with a masterpiece (see Diagram 1). This leads us, in addition, to account for the *sui generis* character of ritual in a way quite different from Jennings.

Recall that Jennings emphasizes the active and fitting exploration of bodily movement as the essence of ritual, thus characterizing ritual action as a *sui generis* source of knowledge rather than a re-presentation of theological or other knowledge. This emphasis is appropriate for the first stance, which understands ritual activity as an exploration for fitting action, and it also will play a role in our characterization of the second stance. But Jennings's reductive analysis is incomplete when applied to the view of ritual as unchanging masterpiece, since artistic masterworks are indissoluble wholes comprising physical, formal, and symbolic elements.²⁸

To clarify this last statement, an analogy with opera may be helpful. Arguably, opera does what only it can do and in ways unique to itself. Its fundamental characteristic is that it is constituted by sung musical sounds. But we cannot account for its *sui generis* status among the arts by appealing only to that dimension of sound. Opera's unique contribution is the result of its special *combination* of instrumental, vocal, and recited sounds plus setting, costuming, dramatic action, dance, and narrative structures. That some of these elements are borrowed from other art forms (e.g., drama) does not mean that what the opera expresses and accomplishes is merely something borrowed from another medium. Distinct from a dramatic form, there is an operatic form with its own potential for expression which results from the interaction, opposition, and mutual reinforcement of the elements previously listed.

Consequently, in developing the second stance, we will account for the *sui generis* status of ritual performance not by reducing it to its fundamental reliance on gesture/action but by describing its unique *integration* of movement, visual figure, *manhira*, setting, and interpretative frames such as the theological.²⁹ This is consistent with the position developed in

28. See above, part one, and Rappaport 1979:175.

29. Though ritual thus affords a *sui generis* means to knowledge, it might be thought that the knowledge of virtue thus arrived at is not itself *sui generis* but is attainable as well by other means. We suspect, however, that if the means are unique, so will be the resultant knowledge. Take, for example, the knowledge of momentum acquired by a physicist, on the one hand, and a bicyclist, on the other. Though there is a sense in which the bicyclist knows the same things about momentum as does the physicist, the former knows *how*, and the latter via knowing *that*. So it is plausible to claim that neither knows what the

chapters 4 and 5 of part one concerning holistic explanation and integrative contexts. About the relation between theological doctrine and ritual action, Dastur Kortenwald affirms that "ritual does not exist by itself. One [ritual] cannot exist without the other [doctrine]" (Boyd 1976).

But this second stance, contrasting to Jennings's view, is not finally persuasive unless and until much more is said. For Jennings can respond in any of several ways. First, the ritual priest may be mistaken about the ultimate nature of his task, or we may be misinterpreting his views. Second, Dastur Kortenwald's statements can be viewed as an expression of the pedagogical aspects of ritual practice in the narrow sense of pedagogy; that is, he is merely learning what the ancients knew and have passed on *via* the ceremonies. Hence he is coming to possess knowledge new to him but not new to the tradition. Finally, Jennings can claim that this is pedagogy in the broader sense: the ritual's fitting actions are being analogically extended by the ritual priest to his extra-ritualistic life. The claim would be that the fitting actions form a paradigm for further action until such future time as they will be found inadequate, i.e., disconfirmed.

Our rejoinder to these projected criticisms constitutes the remainder of part two. But to answer in brief and to indicate the general direction of our argument, we respond as follows. With respect to the question of the ritual priest's understanding of the nature of his task and our interpretation, we must simply state that we trust our fieldwork and the informant. His may not be the last word, but it is the first. Jennings relies on synchronic (cross-cultural) and diachronic studies of actual ritual change, and certainly evidence can be found of constructive phases of ritual during which change is expected and welcomed. But one can also find evidence of the commitment to no change, as we are able to document both historically and in contemporary fieldwork.³⁰

other does. The bicyclist who doesn't know physics will not be able to make precise predictions, whereas the unpracticed physicist will likely fall off the bike. Similarly, Dastur Kortenwald will claim that the ritualist will lead a different moral life from the person informed by ethics and philosophical discussions of virtue, even though each pursues righteousness and grows in goodness, and both might assent to the same moral propositions.

30. For evidence of Zoroastrian commitment to continuity in practice in the

Our position is that it is more plausible to postulate two stances (perhaps at war with each other within a person or a community) than to deny the validity of one or the other. The two stances may compete with each other, but they do not replace each other. Neither we nor Jennings claims that our accounts, by themselves, constitute a full explanation. In some situations, Jennings' analysis is more appropriate than ours; in others, the reverse is the case. By recognizing that there are two contrasting stances, it may be possible to arrive at a more complete picture of the parameters involved in the whole issue of ritual knowing. However, we are claiming that Jennings' view alone is not an adequate replacement for the more traditional understanding of ritual as meaningfully repetitive.

The other two criticisms, both of which confine repetitive ritual to the function of pedagogy, elicit two responses. First, we will suggest a different model of what is going on during periods of no change. Rather than these being interim phases of stable pedagogy between intervals of creativity and discontinuation, we envision them as indefinitely long-lived periods in which a carefully preserved ritual is used as an instrument of unlimited transformation—the generation of new knowledge. This view is delineated in what follows and is developed via a theory of metaphor.

As for the concept of pedagogy itself, we view repeated ritual as only partly a matter of transplanting knowledge "gained elsewhere." We will argue that not everything "learned" from a ritual was originally intended. This view derives from our description of how it is possible to gain new knowledge from an unchanging ritual/artwork.

face of change, as well as to the commonalities between Zoroastrian practices in Iran and India, see, e.g., Modi 1922:152ff.; Boyce 1975:125, 173, 226; and Koriwal and Boyd 1991: 62, n. 3.

THE NOETIC FUNCTION OF RITUAL REPETITION

In this chapter, we will construct the remaining interpretive categories necessary for the explanation of ritual's double role as both stabilizing horizon and lure to new insight. This will complete the theoretical scaffolding which informs our analysis of the noetic function of ritual, viewed from within the second stance. In later chapters, the resulting method of analysis will be applied to one of the most commonly repeated rituals in the Zoroastrian community, the Atrinaagan or "blessings" ceremony.

The adequacy of these additional categories can be judged by the extent to which they succeed in the elaboration of the notions of masterpiece, invariance, and horizon, discussed in the previous chapter, and by the extent to which they make possible a convincing account of the noetic function of religious rituals such as the Atrinaagan.¹

A. TURNING TO METAPHOR

TO UNDERSTAND RITUAL

The interpretive categories will be developed by an examination of two theories of metaphor.² For a time, then, this investigation will shift to a discussion of certain features of language. Rather than continuing to inquire directly about how ritual accomplishes its noetic function, we will ask instead what kinds of tasks metaphors perform and how they do it. The reason for our reflecting on the nature of metaphorical discourse can be suggested by briefly considering a specific ritual example.

1. GESTURE AS VISUAL METAPHOR: AN EXAMPLE

The visual/dramatic focal point of the Atrinaagan ceremony is an exchange of flowers between two priests, undertaken while

1. The demonstration that the interpretive categories are adequate in both these ways is not completed until chap. 10.
2. The categories are the "powers of metaphor" described below in sec. C, "Powers of Metaphor," and applied in chaps. 8 and 9.

they are chanting selections from the Avestan scriptures. One priest receives eight flowers, a few at a time, from the other in a carefully prescribed sequence; the flowers are then returned. The gestures of exchange are intricate, graceful, and marked by deliberate pauses.³

Of interest here are the various interpretations of the

flower exchange offered by scholars and practitioners. The exchange is claimed by some to symbolize the journey of the righteous soul from this world to the next, or to enact visually the interchange between the visible and invisible realms, or to depict right communication. But others, such as Dastur Kotwal, caution against too much reliance on interpretations, saying that such statements are merely made "to satisfy the brain" and that the primary meaning is given by the ritual act itself (Boyd 1976). In our view, both kinds of claims are correct. On the one hand, no interpretation exhausts the meaning of the flower ceremony, which is a self-contained action (bare gesture) not to be traded in for words. On the other hand, the ritual action is embedded in a centuries-old theological interpretive framework which contributes importantly to its meaning and can be expressed in words.

By both inviting and exceeding interpretation, the gestures of the flower exchange resemble *verbal* figures such as metaphor and simile. It is as if the exchange says to us: "The soul's journey is like this," or "This is how the visible and invisible realms intermingle," or "Right communication is an exchange of flowers." Given the metaphorical interpretation of this ritual gesture, it is appropriate to examine theories of metaphor to see how they might advance our understanding of ritual's noetic function.

B. THEORIES OF METAPHOR: TWO POLES OF THE RITUAL IMAGE

Among the various theories of metaphor, the two views we will consider are diametrically opposed. The first claims that verbal figures have metaphorical meaning; the second denies that there is such meaning. Although these two claims are competing

3. See chaps. 9 and 10 below for a detailed analysis of the flower exchange.

and conflicting theories, each intended by their defenders to be adequate to the whole range of metaphor or image, we are going to treat them as two *poles* constitutive of the nature and powers of metaphor, poles which establish the field of force within which metaphors exert their influence. We will clarify our position further following a brief delineation of the two opposing views.

1. FIRST POLE: METAPHORS ARE MEANINGFUL AND SOMETIMES TRUE

The power of the image is the power of seeing resemblances, a discipline important to the growth of intelligence.

—ROBERT BLY
"What the Image Can Do"

The metaphorical use of an expression consists, on this view, of the use of that expression in other than its proper or normal sense, in some context that allows the improper or abnormal sense to be detected. . . .

—MAX BLACK
Models and Metaphors

a. **The Literary Tradition.** Common sense and much of the literary/philosophical tradition assure us that metaphors have special *metaphorical meanings* which allow each of them to say one thing and mean another. Metaphors can be logically false ("man is a wolf") or trivially true ("business is business") when only their literal meanings are considered; but in addition, they can be interestingly true or false, and therein lies their power.

A number of literary theories endeavor to explain how the "interesting" side of metaphors works. Metaphors are said to be replacements for literal expressions, similes in disguise, or open-ended sequences of comparisons. Other theories suggest that terms used metaphorically signify their connotations rather than their denotations, or interact in such a way that one term (e.g., "wolf") functions as a filter, selecting only part of the meaning of another term ("man").⁴ The common theme underlying

4. See Donaldson 1984:chap. 3 for an excellent review of these theories. See also Black 1962:chap. 3, and Beardsley's "The Metaphorical Twist," reprinted in Shibles 1972:73-92.

all these varying theories is that metaphors have special meanings and, as such, are devices which allow a writer to convey an intended message to a reader by employing words that generate meanings separate from their literal meanings.

b. Analysis. Since our ritual example is the gesture/image of the flower exchange, the most promising theory of metaphor to analyze is one which deals not with ordinary simple metaphors but with more complex poetic images. The contemporary poet Robert Bly, in his essay "What the Image Can Do," provides us with such a theory. He claims that, first, a poetic image expresses a hidden, complex analogy, and second, this analogy puts us in mind of a new or remembered connection. The verbal image "marks the before unapprehended relations of things" or brings "up into consciousness a relationship that has been forgotten for centuries" (1982:42-43).⁵ Thus,

the poet receives a permanent addition to his knowledge. . . . The power of the image is the power of seeing resemblances, a discipline important to the growth of intelligence. (1982:43)

Consider the following example by the poet Rilke, who refers to "That blind man, standing on the bridge, as gray as some abandoned empire's boundary stone" (1981:95; see also Bly 1982:38). This imagistic sentence generates metaphors and similes, and brings to light several hidden analogies. The man and the stone are directly compared; they are alike in their grayness and, no doubt, in their age and immobility, and in other ways as well. But the hidden analogy is more complex than might be expected, for the poetic line does not merely say that the man is as gray as the stone; it mentions the empire. Hence, the analogy is at least four-term: as the empire is to its boundary stone, something unmentioned (X) is to the man. This X must be like the empire, and its relation to the man must be like the empire's relation to the boundary stone. Perhaps X is the man's former

5. Bly borrows these ideas from Shelley and Owen Barfield and develops them further. An example of a previously forgotten connection is the relationship between a woman's body and a tree, a relation known in the Middle Ages but now appreciated anew by means of poetic images.

power and potency, the "territory" over which he "ruled." He once was, as it were, an ordered society, but he is now fallen to ruin, disintegrated so that his gray, unseeing body is no longer the functioning sign of his former self. Instead, his body has become a weakened sign whose referent, his now-vanished domain and dominion, is forgotten. This analogy reminds us of a forgotten connection: persons are like societies. Having gone this far, we can see that other things are suggested by the analogy, though as yet unsaid. Chief among these is the notion of time and its ravages. Not only is the empire gone, but even its stones are weathered, and it itself is forgotten. The man is on a bridge, arching perhaps toward death. Additionally, an open-ended set of metaphorical connections is generated: the man is a stone, is like a boundary stone of a forgotten empire, is himself a forgotten empire, and so on. Even to say he is gray is not to make a straightforward application of a color predicate to a subject but is to speak metaphorically. So, when we pursue an image, we are on the trail of hidden analogies whose meanings can be discovered. Bly sketches a criterion against which such images can be measured:

Of course not every image the mind makes up is a true one, and we have the right to ask of every image in a poem: Does this image help us to remember a forgotten relationship, or is it merely a silly juxtaposition, which is amusing and no more? (1982:43)

This talk of discovery, truth, and criterion indicates that we are in the realm of the noetic function of images.

c. Encoded Ritual Images. Theories such as Bly's account for at least those metaphorical or imagistic expressions which are employed to convey intended meanings. The advantage of this kind of theory is that it can explain the application of concepts such as truth, adequacy, and meaning to figurative language. As an investigative category of ritual, it characterizes one aspect of the second stance: ritual images/metaphors encode meanings of a tradition and, as such, function as stabilizing horizons. This feature is compatible with Jennings's view of repeated ritual as pedagogy. What the ancients encoded in a "ritual metaphor," Jennings might claim, the contemporary

practitioner can later learn by repeating the ritual so that in the end, he or she possesses the same knowledge as that of the ancestors.⁶ But critics claim that such analyses cannot convincingly account for our sense that metaphors are open-ended invitations to interpretation and can appear in some cases as inexhaustible sources of meanings.⁷

2. SECOND POLE: METAPHORS ARE MEANINGLESS

We must give up the idea that a metaphor carries a message, that it has content and meaning. . . .

—DONALD DAVIDSON
"What Metaphors Mean"

a. Textuality and Traces. During the last two decades,

several philosophers in both continental and analytic traditions have taken issue with such established views as we have been discussing. For example, some recent theories of meaning and literary criticism, particularly French "post-structuralism," confront us with a radical view of how written art forms work. Philosophers such as Derrida and Barthes insist both that there is no literal level of language, or at least no rule-guided way of distinguishing the literal from the metaphorical, and that meaning is not embedded in the text but arises from the complex interplay of texts, interpretations, and traces of traditional societal codes—theirself ever-changing and only partially reducible to rule. Thus, the hermeneutic enterprise of reconstructing the deeper, true meaning of, say, the classical texts of the ancients or holy writ implanted by deities, is really, to the post-structuralist enterprise, a tracing of the interconnections between the text and the historically situated reader. Metaphors have no meaning on their own.

6. Jennings, of course, holds that what is learned is the action itself, but we want to consider the action-in-its-environment, so here a "Jennings-like view" is that the ritual action embedded in the environment expresses a content that can be learned; that is, it transmits a "message."
7. The situation is actually more complex. Bly, for example, speaks of certain mythic images which "once found persist for centuries, and people never exhausted . . . [their] possibilities" (1982:47). The question is how metaphors that are claimed to convey intended meanings or to remind us of forgotten relationships can be inexhaustible. The opposing views discussed below in sec. 2, "Second Pole," all claim to have the answers.

Among American philosophers, Donald Davidson argues for a somewhat similar point of view. Davidson's view is less radical than those of Derrida and Barthes, for though he denies special meaning to metaphors, he does so in the service of a larger plan, to preserve a more structured and traditional theory of how literal language refers and means.⁸ His essay "What Metaphors Mean" (1978) affords us a way of explicating the second pole of figurative language in its less extreme form.

b. Analysis. Davidson agrees with most general claims typically made about metaphors: that they can be appropriate or not, that they can be interpreted, and that they often are open to a wide range of adequate interpretations. What he wishes to oppose is the notion that one can *explain* what is going on with metaphors by appeal to a special *metaphorical meaning* different from the meaning generated by the ordinary, literal significations of the words: "No theory of metaphorical meaning or metaphorical truth can help explain how metaphor works" (1978:43). Metaphors do their jobs in much the same way a visual collage does its job. When Marcel Duchamp made a sculpture by placing a bicycle wheel on top of a wooden stool, viewers were faced with a mysterious object open to interpretation, but there was no special and definite metaphorical meaning already in place to be discovered. What was there was a wheel on top of the stool. Davidson says:

We must give up the idea that a metaphor carries a message, that it has a content or meaning (except, of course, its literal meaning). The various theories we have been considering mistake their goal. Where they think they provide a method for deciphering an encoded content, they actually tell us (or try to tell us) something about the *effects* metaphors have on us. The common error is to fasten on the contents of the thought as a metaphor provides and to read these contents into the metaphor itself. No doubt metaphors often make us notice aspects of things we did not notice before; no doubt they bring surprising analogies and similarities to our attention; they do provide a kind of lens or lattice, as Black says, through which we view the relevant phenomena. The issue does not lie here but in the question of how the metaphor is related to what it makes us see. (1978:45)

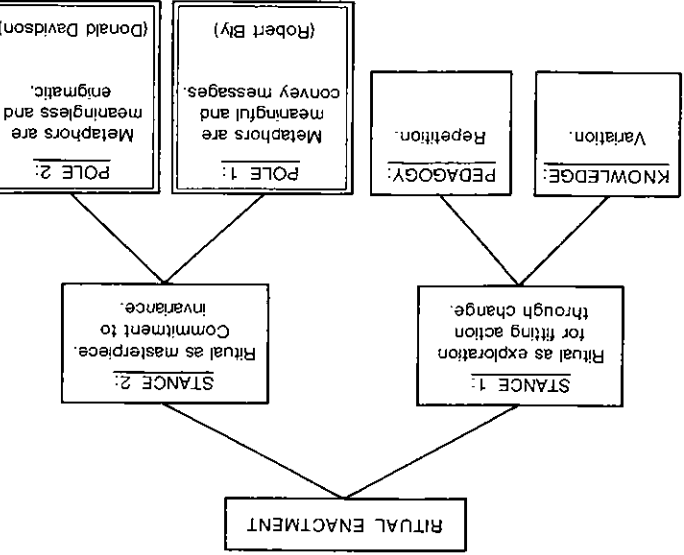
8. See Davidson 1986 for a more recent, more radical, and highly provocative view of literal language.

That is, words used metaphorically have no special features prior to and independent of the context in which they are used. There is no metaphorical meaning in the words themselves, by themselves. This means that whatever we carry away from an encounter with a metaphor is the result of a cooperation between its creator, the literal meanings of the words, the context, and *our* imagination. No antecedent meaning rule or rules dictates the outcome of such an encounter. Again, Davidson:

Metaphor is the dreamwork of language and, like all dreamwork, its interpretation reflects as much on the interpreter as on the originator. The interpretation of dreams requires collaboration between a dreamer and a waker, even if they be the same person; and the act of interpretation is itself a work of the imagination. So too understanding a metaphor is as much a creative endeavor as making a metaphor, and as little guided by rules. (1978:31)

This understanding of metaphor stresses the possibility of imaginative interpretation, and also accounts for our prior as-
 sersion that metaphors are "inexhaustible," although in a much different way. Metaphors are heuristic and create new knowledge not because they contain multiple hidden analogies which only need to be discovered, but because the meanings of metaphors are the product of, are generated by, creative collaborations between the image and the interpreter, who may be situated in changing social and theological conditions.
 Metaphors, in this view, always provoke interpretation and, at the same time, defeat any one, settled interpretation. They call into question each interpretation not only because they are contradictory if literally understood (human beings are not wolves) but also because they are something other than a propositional statement.

c. Interactive Ritual Images. Theories such as Davidson's allow us further to clarify our characterization of the second stance toward ritual repetition: ritual can act as a receding as well as a stabilizing horizon, and there is a noetic function to ritual repetition *which cannot be reduced to mere pedagogy*. Learning of what was discovered "elsewhere and otherwise" is only one part of what is transmitted by repetitive ritual action, image, or metaphor. Beyond pedagogy are those meanings which are the re-



sult of the creative interaction between practitioner and un-

3. THE TWO POLES DEFINE A FIELD OF POSSIBILITY

Although the two theories of metaphor oppose each other, they can also be treated as two poles which define the full range of metaphorical possibilities (see Diagram 2). To clarify what we mean by polar explanation, we will consider an analogy with visual gestalt shifts. Recall the well-known line drawing of the chalice which is also two profiles of human faces. Looked at one way, the drawing is seen as a chalice; looked at another way, the drawing is seen as a face. The drawing cannot be seen both ways simultaneously. This suggests that rather than taking the two theories to be incompatible so that only one can be true, we will see each of them as illuminating one way, but not the only way, of viewing the potentials of metaphor—two equally cogent but mutually incompatible approaches to how metaphors do what they do. Together, like oppositely charged sources of an

electromagnetic field, they are the two poles which define the field in which metaphor has its being.

One can detect in these two polar positions two contrasting views of language. One view argues that bits of language have deep structures and meanings (obvious or hidden), and hence that they convey messages. This position is governed by the metaphor of *penetration* to the true meaning. The other view claims that meaning is generated via interactions among texts and creative interpretations. Such meaning exists, so to speak, *between* the texts and is liable to constant change. This position is governed by the metaphor of *unraveling* the multitude of intertextual connections.⁹ Some figures of literature and images of art are alike in moving freely between these polar alternatives so that they both convey and confound, transmit and invite, narrow down and open up.

This polar view finds corroboration from poets themselves. The Spanish poet Federico Garcia Lorca, for example, distinguishes two kinds of poetic image. The first is bound by the laws of "human logic, which is controlled by, and cannot break free of, reason." This kind of poetry is used by the poet to "construct a tower against mystery and against the elements" (1940; 1988: xvi). It is similar to our first pole, in which metaphors are seen as expressing analogies and containing meaning.

The second kind of figure, which Lorca values more highly, is the "hermetic image." It evades the meanings of consensus reality and confronts us with indecipherable mystery.¹⁰ The poem becomes a "self-sufficient entity without reference to any reality outside itself" (xvi). The image has no analogical meaning and ultimately remains inexplicable. This view is similar to our second pole, delineated by Davidson. Hermetic images are without "explanation" and have no "correct" interpretation or "true read-

9. The unraveling metaphor is hinted at by Roland Barthes in a passage urging that the structuralists' notion of a deep structure *beneath* the surface be replaced by the post-structuralists' idea of a *horizontal* set of surface-textual interconnections: "In the multiplicity of writing, everything is to be *dismantled, nothing deciphered*; the structure can be "run" (like a thread of a stocking) at every point and at every level, but there is nothing beneath: the space of writing is to be ranged over, not pierced . . ." (cited in Young 1981: 18).

10. Lorca called the second kind of image the "poetic fact" (*hecho poetico*); his editor calls it "hermetic image" (Lorca 1940: xvi). We prefer the latter term.

ing" (xviii). Such images are thought by Lorca to be particularly fit for evading containment of mystery in the cage of language. Contrast, for example, the suggested *meaning* of the phrase "a harp of living tree trunks" (177) with the following *inexplicable* juxtapositions: "landscape of pulverized ambushes" (121). The lessons learned from these remarks are at least three: (1) some metaphors, images, or similes strike one immediately as meaningful or potentially so, while others remain enigmatic without obvious metaphorical import; (2) the latter, hermetic images, keep open spaces for the expression of mystery; (3) other images, like charged particles oscillating in an electromagnetic field, will move between these two poles, depending on the context and our interpretation, thus constituting a wide range of possibilities.

By means of this polar analysis, we now can develop a fuller description of the powers of figurative language. This will enable us to look once again at a ritual image, such as the flower exchange, to see how it can be an unchanging instrument of transformation.

C. POWERS OF METAPHOR

It is possible to generate at least five functions of metaphors or images from the foregoing discussion. They can *lure* us to deeper involvement with the work or ritual, *focus* our attention, *convey* intended messages, *oppose* any settled understanding, and function as a *potential* source and object of further interpretation.¹¹

11. These powers are functions of figurative language relevant to our purposes. They have not been generated from a single source nor according to a fixed method, so their ancestry is complex. It will become apparent, for example, that conveying and potentiating follow quite naturally from the theories of Bly and Davidson, respectively, but the inspiration for these powers is the double role of horizon discussed in the previous chapter. Luring is also suggested by the function of horizon in right repetition, but it is derived as well from the power of art in general to entice, a power which we have explicated in part one largely in terms of virtual space. Similarly for the remaining two functions. As stated at the beginning of the present chapter, the adequacy of these five powers as interpretive categories is to be judged by how well they elaborate the key concepts of chap. 6 and by how well they fit and explain the ritual situations described in chaps. 8 and 9.

1. LURING

Luring has primarily to do with our emotional relationship with a metaphor, an image, or a work. The artwork or ritual intrigues, tantalizes, bewitches, or otherwise forcefully engages us. Consider this poem by the tenth-century Chinese Chan poet Han-shan:

So Han-shan writes you these words,
These words which no one will believe.

Honey is sweet; men love the taste.

Medicine is bitter and hard to swallow.

What soothes the feelings brings contentment.

What opposes the will calls forth anger.

Yet I ask you to look at the wooden puppets,

Worn out by their moment of play on stage!

(1962; 1970:117)

The first two lines introduce the poem and immediately challenge us by saying, "You are not going to believe this!" It is a standard kind of lure; what could be so odd that we couldn't believe it? Certainly not "Honey is sweet; men love the taste." We are enticed to read on, finding equally unexceptional claims until we reach the last two lines, which contain a surprise. But more of that later.

Luring, then, indicates the ability of an image, a figure, a work, or a ritual to compel our attention to itself, and draw us further into the processes involved in the ongoing relationship with it.

2. FOCUSING

Whereas luring involves our emotional relationship with the metaphor, focusing has to do primarily with what the figurative language is about. The images of art and ritual focus our attention on some realms of experience rather than others. Han-shan's poem is a climactic piece in a series of poems about insight into the structures of the self and the struggle to achieve such insight. So the reader familiar with the tradition is already focused on that set of issues. But the poem has a more specific focus which begins to emerge in lines three through six. They call our attention to typical and automatic responses to things and situations.

3. CONVEYING

The heading *focusing*, then, refers to the tendency of figures and images, rituals and artworks, to facilitate and maintain our attention to some particular realm of experience and concern.

The salient feature of Bly's view of the poetic image is that figurative devices have special, non-literal meanings antecedent to interpretation. Hence, a metaphor can have the function of conveying meanings, of transmitting messages, albeit in indirect ways.

So far, in our reading of Han-shan's poem, we have relied primarily on its literal meaning. The poet has warned us that the information he seeks to communicate is unlikely to be believed, and he has reminded us of certain habitual responses to everyday situations. We can understand also that these four examples stand in for many other similar cases. It is when we reach the last two lines, however, that the poem begins to reveal its real message. We are asked to consider puppets—presumably to shed light on what has been previously said. The puppets are likened to performers worn out by their performances. We move quickly from the literal sense in which wood and cloth can be worn out to the figurative sense: the way actors can be worn out by the continuing demands of their performances. What further light this image sheds is best discussed in terms of the function of opposition to follow. At the moment, we are just beginning to unpack the metaphor to find the message within.

So *conveying* refers to how a metaphor can teach and what we can learn from it, how it can transplant understanding from one person to another. A metaphor can pattern, suggest, exemplify, bear messages, show forth hidden analogies, and act in concert with other metaphors to create a paradigm, and it can be evaluated as adequate or not, or even as true or false. Though it may be open to interpretation, it is the metaphor's meaning that we are interpreting. We are unpacking it like a suitcase; we are mining its meaning. This is image as horizon in the sense of orienting, structuring, and stabilizing pattern.

4. OPPOSING

The metaphorical meaning relies on the literal meaning, of course, and that meaning is often logically odd or contradictory.

After all, puppets are not really actors. More subtly, a figurative phrase may tempt us in two contrary directions, or may contain within it the potential for defeating or unravelling a present interpretation. It may suggest not a single, hidden analogy as Bly says, but more than one—and contradictory ones, at that.

It is this function of metaphor which dominates our present example. The power of Han-shan's poem lies in the fact that its last lines convey two distinct meanings to us in succession and thus lead us in discernible steps to an illuminating conclusion. As noted, the first, and immediately apparent, metaphor is the puppets as worn-out players. We may picture the puppets lying in a confused tangle in the corner, as if they were human and had become exhausted. But no sooner do we absorb that meaning than it dawns upon us—in the context of the previous lines about our habitual responses—that it is not only the puppets that are human-like, but we who are puppet-like. We extend this second metaphor to ourselves: am I, as a routinized human being, like a worn-out marionette, exhausted from my mechanical reactions to events?

The last two lines afford an example of the opposing function of metaphor, because one can actually experience first a brief halting and then a kind of gestalt shift from one interpretation, developed from the line alone, to the opposite interpretation arrived at by considering the line in the context of earlier lines. Rather than being told something explicitly, we have been led to the experience of sudden insight. We may well feel stunned. Notice that, as a result, we are now in more complete possession of the message conveyed by the poem. All this happens without our trying consciously to dissect the poem. The image itself does the work.

5. POTENTIATING

Under the heading *potentiating* we enter the realm of "meaningless" figures so well described by Davidson. Rather

than an image that is efficacious because it contains a meaning, clear or vague, easily got at or deeply hidden, we have instead figurative language that is in search of meaning. We must become the inventors of meaning where before there was none. There is still potential for further meaning in the Han-shan poem. We have not yet explored the image of ourselves as performers, or of life as play-like. Nor have we entertained for an extended period the suggestive mental image of the ruined puppets lying unused, an image that may lead to further insight. In general, however, the poem is a better example of conveying by means of opposition than of the potentiating function. To illustrate more adequately the function of potentiating, a poem containing hermetic images that lack immediate import and invite creative interpretation will be helpful. Consider the short poem by the modern American poet Saint Geraud; consonant with its open images, it is untitled:

When our hands are alone
They open, like faces.
There is no shore
To their opening.

(See Bly 1971:56)

The poem lures us because it is so enigmatic and suggestive. We may glean a beginning sense of the hitherto unsuspected, limited opening of which hands are capable under the mysterious condition of being "alone." But the poem's focus and message are as yet cognitively unclear to us, though if it works, we may receive from it a specific feeling which may have been intended by the poet.

What is apparent is that the oppositions created by such figures as hands that are alone, hands that are faces, faces that open, and hands or faces that are without a shore, are invitations to exploration and interpretation. Are our hands alone when we are asleep? When we ignore them? When they are at rest? When they come to us in dreams unattached to a body? To the extent that the poem's images are hermetic, they will resist any one interpretation and continue to beckon us.

So the heading *potentiating* refers to the role of the figure as subject to our interpretation, and to its potential as the seemingly

limitless source of promptings. It appears at once as void, as emptiness, a liminality allowing for reinterpretation, and as a source or spring which can be returned to for further insight, though it is we who articulate such insights. In addition, the image may facilitate our keeping open certain questions, which are its focus, as further meanings are generated by the interaction of the verbal figure and the interpreter. The opposing and potentiating functions together convey a sense of undoing, dissolving, and unraveling while holding out the promise of new patterns. Here, instead of mining meanings, we are constructing meanings for a tantalizing, mysterious image which, of course, is not nothing: it has a structure, but no special antecedent significance.

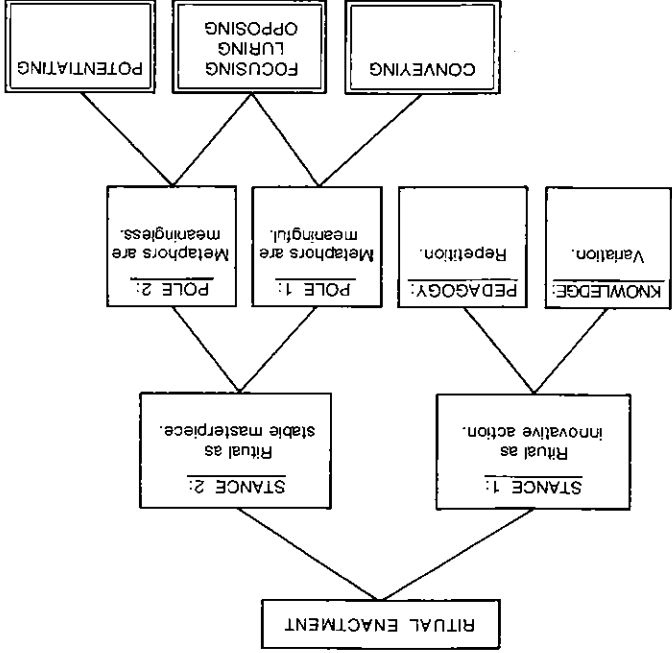
It should be noted that with works of any complexity, one will move through many cycles of deciphering messages, running into oppositions, and constructing further meanings. In contrast, the focus and allure of the work or ritual tend to dominate the process as a whole, continuing to provide a nucleus of concern and to entice us on. Diagram 3 is a general recapitulation to this point.

D. EXPLORING METAPHOR: RISKS AND PROMISES

The risk of having stopped to consider theories of metaphor instead of immediately turning our attention to such ritual gestures as the flower exchange is that, at least initially, it amounts to emphasizing meaning space over physical and virtual space. It thus threatens to be one more example of the preference for theological interpretation and linguistic meta-theory (as opposed to close attention to ritual action), which both we and Jennings decry.

However, the categories developed by investigating theories of metaphor promise to illumine more than might be expected. As the applications to follow will demonstrate, distinguishing the powers of metaphor makes possible a more adequate discussion of the physical and virtual features of the ritual performance. We will not expect such powers to be properties of meaning space alone, but to arise from the interplay of the three spaces. For, in our view, the efficacy of ritual is the product of a complex integration not only of the three spaces comprising

Diagram 3:
The Powers of Metaphor



each artistic medium (i.e., drama, music, dance, the visual and literary arts), but also of these media themselves.¹²

To describe this complexity more easily, we will use the comprehensive and fluid term "image" to designate any of the particular products of the artistic media involved in ritual performances. For example, we will speak of poetic, visual, and gestural images, and also of interpreted and bare images.¹³

12. The three spaces are *necessarily* (internally, logically) connected, in ways discussed in chap. 4, and in each ritual, there will be other, *contingent* connections as well—connections established by that particular work or by the traditional interpretation of the ritual. See also the "opera argument" above, p. 80.

13. Langer held not only that each art medium produces a kind of image natural to that medium but that the different arts can be distinguished solely in terms of the differences in the image produced by each. Further, she used "im-

A DIARY OF RITUAL TRANSFORMATION

At its most general, our claim is that a ritual masterpiece can act as horizon, both patterning (focusing and conveying) and providing the means for the transcendence of pattern (turning, opposing, potentiating). Employing these categories as well as the insights of part one, we now will endeavor to show just how it is possible that a repeated ritual enactment can be an instrument for the acquisition of new knowledge.

It is difficult to demonstrate directly that a particular person has acquired knowledge new to the tradition and that the means to this acquisition is ritual performance. The alternative strategy is to make *plausible* that such knowledge acquisition is *possible* via repeated exposure to a ritual. This and the following chapter are the culmination of that "how possible" argument.

Such a plausibility argument is by nature narrow in scope: one case is sufficient to act as counter example to the view that repetition serves only pedagogical (not noetic) functions. Hence, we are able to confine our attention to Zoroastrian rituals, which are traditional, highly formalized, priestly, ethico-religious ceremonies emphasizing the celebrant/practitioner rather than a general audience or a focal recipient (e.g., an initiate). Because of this narrow focus and our concern to characterize but one possible stance toward ritual practice, our approach is not a general theory. However, it is *generalizable* to very different ritual situations; the account in this chapter is of a contemporary and ephemeral ritual, and the affected party is an audience member rather than a priest. In addition, there is a different *noesis*: the discoveries that are made via the ritual have more to do with an individual's exploration of self than with the extension of one's knowledge of righteousness.

1. It is important to notice that there is no covert claim that only practitioners gain knowledge from ritual performance. No doubt, rituals differ vis-à-vis the parties affected, and more than one group might be affected. The point

In terms of this broad concept, a further point can be made: subsequent discussions will show that it is not necessary to choose only those examples of ritual gesture, such as the flower exchange, which lend themselves to metaphorical interpretation. Any ritual gesture can display the same sorts of power possessed by verbal figures. The powers of metaphor are, to a large degree, powers of the (artistic) image, whatever kind of image it may be.¹⁴

The next step in our argument is a more detailed account of the interaction between practitioner and ritual, employing the interpretive categories that have been developed. Such a description will characterize the processes of daily change brought about by living with a masterpiece.

age" to stand for what we have called "virtual space." In contrast, we use "image" in two senses: to refer to the physical/virtual aspects of an artistic product (e.g., the uninterpreted gestural image of the flower exchange), and to refer to the interconnected whole made up of all three spaces (e.g., the interpreted gestural image of the flower exchange).

14. This is true for the five general powers discussed here; it does not mean that poetry and drama, for example, are identical in their means and effects. Each art form does what only it can do, in ways unique to itself.

A. A NOVELIST'S ACCOUNT OF THE NOETIC

FUNCTION OF REPETITION: SARTRE'S ROQUENTIN

We move, then, to a detailed description of the subtle opportunities for growth afforded by the ritual situation. This will give us the microstructure of change which has been missing in the argument up to this point. What is needed is something like a diary, chronicling moment-by-moment changes in a person repeatedly exposed to a ritual artwork. The example explored in this chapter, though fictional, is just such a diary. It is contained in Sartre's existentialist novel *Nausea* (1938), which purports to be the journal of his protagonist, Antoine Roquentin. It provides a series of striking descriptions of the effect on Roquentin of repeated hearings of a popular jazz recording.

In the typical fieldwork situation, we lack such a daily chronicle of interaction and change. Instead we have our own observations of the ceremonies and the practitioner's remarks about them, as well as his general remarks about his life and community. Could there not be such a priestly diary? It is possible but unlikely. It is doubtful that a journal could be constructed by a ritual practitioner without its interfering with the very processes it would seek to set down. Our interest as students of ritual is in the rational reconstruction of processes which themselves are often unconscious, or only incompletely understood at the time of their occurrence, or difficult to verbalize. In contrast, Sartre's novel portrays an ideal observer whose descriptive and analytic skills permit an almost agonizingly self-conscious account of ritual transformation. In effect, we will treat the Sartrean example as one more set of field notes about a ritual to which our interpretive categories can fruitfully be applied. In this respect, the treatment will be similar to that in the following chapter which is an application of our view to the Zoroastrian Atrinanagan.

1. ROQUENTIN'S "RITUAL"

Roquentin's diary chronicles his descent into Nothingness. Sartre's hero is nauseated by a world of brute fact, of things without essence. Reeling from the confrontation with irrational

is that our concentration on the practitioner in this book is a product of our ex- ample rather than an assumption or result of our view.

existence and unable to take comfort from rational philosophy, of despair. We need not analyze his "nausea" and its sources; suffice it to say that for him the world is progressively disintegrating. His perceptions lack coherence, and what meaning there is in things, persons, and events seems arbitrarily and only temporarily imposed.

Apparently Roquentin has been listening regularly to an American tune when he comes in the evenings to the bistro which contains a gramophone and a worn record. For whatever reasons, he is attracted to the recorded song; the music is already acting as a *lure*. Early in his account, he asks the waitress to play "the one I like; you know: *Some of These Days*" (1938:32). He hopes that she will not again make a mistake and play the wrong piece, so we can infer that not any work will do. The mightily performance is, in our terminology, like an irreplaceable ritual exactly repeated each time it is played.

We can imagine, further, that the piece *conveys* certain thoughts and feelings intended by the composer. As a blues-like improvisation about the prospects of lost love, it mirrors Roquentin's lonely situation, his concerns about his previous love affair, and his alienation. But primarily, it serves to maintain his focus on the metaphysical problem of meaning, which is his current obsession. As his description of his reactions develops, it becomes clearer just what features of the music are alluring and how they deepen his attention.

He gives an account of an evening when he is acutely aware of his surroundings, particularly of the foursome playing cards nearby. The record begins, and Roquentin writes:

The vocal chorus will be along shortly. I like that part especially and the abrupt manner in which it throws itself forward, like a cliff against the sea. For the moment, the jazz is playing; there is no melody, only notes, a myriad of tiny jolts. They know no rest, even giving them time to recuperate and exist for themselves. They race, they press forward, they strike me a sharp blow in passing and are obliterated. I would like to hold them back, but I know if I succeeded in stopping one it would remain between my fingers only as a rattish languishing sound. I must accept their death; I must even will it. I know few impressions stronger or more harsh. (1938; 1964:33)

and beer, "a small happiness of Nausea." But the second is extraordinary and arises from the virtual power of the music: There is another happiness: outside there is this band of steel, the narrow duration of the music which traverses our time through and through, rejecting it, tearing at it with its dry little points; there is another time. . . .

A few seconds more and the Negress will sing. It seems inevitable, so strong is the necessity of this music: nothing can interrupt it, nothing which comes from this time in which the world has fallen; it will stop of itself, as if by order. If I love this beautiful voice it is especially because of that: . . . because it is the event for which so many noises have been preparing, from so far away, dying that it might be born. And yet I am troubled; it would take so little to make the record stop: a broken spring. . . . How strange it is, how moving, that this hardness should be so fragile. Nothing can interrupt it yet all can break it. (33-34)

We are in the presence of another *opposition*, one usually at work unconsciously but here articulated by a man at home in the realm of ontological theory. It is the opposition between the ideal virtual dimension of music, the intended sequence of notes, and their less-than-perfect physical instantiation, between the pattern and its performance. Roquentin returns to this issue later in his diary:

It is necessity that interests us here, a necessity that wears two contrary faces—one the causal necessity of the mechanically produced sounds, the other the aesthetic necessity or rightness of the composition. Also the power of the artwork to create its own virtual time, to exist as it were in a purer dimension, is part of its allure.

The music has reached the pregnant moment of silence between instrumental introduction and the sung chorus:

In the brief silence which follows I feel strongly that there it is, that something has happened.

Silence.

*Some of these days
You'll miss me honey[.]*

What has just happened is that the Nausea has disappeared.

At first the notes of the recorded jazz piece appear as bare events which do not add up even to a melody.² Then the music becomes a source of similes and analogies. Roquentin moves naturally from the notes as brute fact, without further meaning, to images of frantic, compelled activity, and thence to notions of necessity and sacrifice. There is even the hint of metaphysical speculation about the necessity of individual death so that something greater, the musical form in this case, may exist.

He has begun to perceive an underlying tension (*opposition*) which will grow in importance. The notes present themselves as both things and signs (the physical and meaning aspects of the artwork). As the former, they are part of a mechanical record, a causal order without inherent sense.³ As the latter, they express feelings and suggest hidden analogies to life in general and to Roquentin's situation in particular, as we shall see. Roquentin's perception of the notes as mere things is a special case of his overall malaise—nausea in the face of objects without essence.

Contradictions exist between expressive signs and bare events, between significance and meaninglessness, between signs conveying an intended message and empty signs in search of interpretation. Again, in our terminology, there is evidence of the functions of *conveying*, *opposing*, and *potentiating*, echoing Davidson.

The music continues, and the protagonist begins to experience two kinds of happiness. The first is related to relaxation

2. Often in this and the following chapters, we have recourse to notions such as *bare* or *pure* acts, or events. In so doing, we are not postulating bare facts absolutely free of interpretation. Rather, we are speaking of images, gestures, and sounds which are *relatively* free of interpretation. We have in mind the several ways in which one can de-emphasize meaning in favor of attention to virtual images themselves—their physical and virtual features, or to bodily movements, or to the mere sounds of words or notes. It is possible, for example, to see a red portion of a canvas as simply a patch of red without seeing it as a flower or a symbol of passion. Attention to the thing itself requires setting aside standard interpretations in favor of a more fluid perception open to new meanings; such attention may even include the contemplation of ritual acts from within the "empty mind" celebrated in various mystical traditions.

3. Roquentin is tempted by an even more radical position—namely, that causal order is an illusion, a temporary habit of nature liable to change (1938:212ff.).

As we have seen, the notes, on the one hand, are merely a determined series of events without meaning, and on the other hand, they exemplify a harmonious and perfect, invulnerable order. It is to this second aspect that Roquentin responds when the piece temporarily lifts him out of his Nausea and informs his every movement, its virtual power creating a new time, space, and movement. He sees his life suddenly as itself exhibiting a similar unalterable order, an order that occasionally issues in special moments, "adventures," of which the current extramundane moment is an example.

This rudimentary "theory" about himself and the meaning of his life he will soon abandon, but it is worthwhile to pause and consider some of the complexity of his present insight. The virtual power of the piece began to inform his gestures and to give a feeling of grace to his actions. This change affected his perception of the others in the cafe, and the card game seemed to partake of a similar beauty.

At the same time, there is the *potential* for interpreting in an indefinitely large number of ways the opposing tensions in the music he has been noticing. The creative insight that occurs is inseparable from his act of constructing a complex analogy: his life, like the game and the notes, is not a product of chaotic, random occurrences but is a series of events exemplifying a necessary order, on analogy with the causal necessity of the notes. And among those events have been special moments like the current one, moments exhibiting an ideal structure, i.e., an aesthetic necessity, like that which informs the music.

Roquentin is getting out of the experience more than can plausibly be thought to have been intended by the composer, consciously or otherwise; this is a good example of *potential*. Meanwhile, on a different level of opposition, another interpretation of the notes as driven sequence without significance lies in wait to pull him out of his euphoria.

2. A DARK DISCOVERY

The memory of the recording is still informing and challenging Roquentin's thoughts/feelings a few days later when he finds himself in conversation with a local resident who is in awe of the writer's education and travels:

When the voice was heard in the silence, I felt my body harden and the Nausea vanish. Suddenly: it was almost unbearable to become so hard, so brilliant. At the same time the music was drawn out, dilated, swelled like a waterspout. It filled the room with its metallic transparency, crushing our miserable time against the walls. I am in the music. . . . I stretch out my hand [toward the beer glass] . . . God! That is what has changed, my gestures. This movement of my arm has developed like a majestic theme, it has glided along the song of the Negress; I seemed to be dancing. (34-35)

Aside from the facts that Roquentin is a listener rather than a performer and that he is relating to popular music rather than traditional ritual, one could hardly imagine a passage more precisely illustrative of the *pedagogic* function of ritual as Jennings portrays it. The music becomes a fitting action, and the listener's movements are informed by its rhythm and harmonious presence. Subsequently, the piece's form even shifts Roquentin's visual perception as he watches the card game, for the movements of the players take on a similar heightened grace. And these actions of the game in turn lead to a new analogy with the protagonist's life up to this moment:

I am touched, I feel my body at rest like a precision machine. I have had real adventures. I can recapture no detail but I perceive the rigorous succession of circumstances. I have crossed seas, left cities behind me, followed the course of rivers or plunged into forests, always making my way toward other cities. I have had women, I have fought with men; and never was I able to turn back, any more than a record can be reversed. And all that led me—where?

At this very instant on this bench, in this translucent bubble all humming with music.

And when you leave me

Yes, I who loved so much to sit on the banks of the Tiber at Rome, or in the evening, in Barcelona, . . . I am here, living in the same second as these card players, I listen to a Negress sing while outside roves the feeble night.

The record stops. (35-36)

He leans towards me, his eyes half closed, and asks:

"Have you had many adventures, Monsieur?"

"A few," I answer mechanically. . . . (52)

A little later, smoking his pipe and musing about his past escapes,

Roquentin comes to see them as just so many events among others. He begins to question why he should call them

"adventures." "Well, you can call that by any name you like," he concludes; "in any case, it was an event which happened to me."

Then suddenly a stronger claim:

I have never had adventures. Things have happened to me,

events, incidents, anything you like. But no adventures. It isn't a

question of words; I am beginning to understand. There is something to which I cling more than all the rest—without completely

realizing it. It wasn't love. Heaven forbid, not glory, not money. It

was. . . I had imagined that at certain times my life could take on a

rare and precious quality. There was no need for extraordinary

circumstances: all I asked for was a little precision. There is nothing

brilliant about my life now: but from time to time, for example, when they play music in the cafes, I look back and tell myself:

in old days, in London, Meknes, Tokyo, I have known great moments, I have had adventures. Now I am deprived of this. I have

suddenly learned, without any apparent reason, that I have been

lying to myself for ten years. And naturally, everything they tell

about in books can happen in real life, but not in the same way. It

is to this way of happening that I cling so tightly. (53-54)

Roquentin sees that he has told himself an untrue story about the significance of his life—a life, so he thought, of special moments—and he wonders what a real adventure, even though impossible, would be like.

The darker side of the notes, when they appear to be devoid of meaning and thus all on the same evaluative level, has re-emerged. It is the source of the interpretation of life as without the possibility of real distinctions between ordinary and special moments:

The beginnings would have had to be real beginnings. Alas! Now I see so clearly what I wanted. Real beginnings are like a fanfare of trumpets, like the first notes of a jazz tune, cutting short re-

dium, making for continuity: then you say about these evenings within evenings: "I was out for a walk, it was an evening in May." You walk, the moon has just risen, you feel lazy, vacant, a little empty. And then suddenly you think: "Something has happened." No matter what: a slight rustling in the shadow, a thin silhouette crossing the street. But this paltry event is not like the others: suddenly you see that it is the beginning of a great shape whose outlines are lost in mist and you tell yourself, "Something is beginning." (54)

He goes on to describe such an imagined beginning in detail, likening it to the notes that must soon die but are to be cherished as unique, irreplaceable:

Yes, it's what I wanted—what I still want. I am so happy when a Negress sings: what summits would I not reach if my own life made the subject of the melody.

The idea is still there, unnameable. It waits, peacefully. Now it seems to say:

"Yes? Is that what you wanted? Well, that's exactly what you've never had (remember you fooled yourself with words, you called the glitter of travel, the love of women, quarters, and trinkets—adventure) and this is what you'll never have—and no one other than yourself."

But Why? WHY? (55)

The former interpretation of the music and his life of epiphanies now reveals itself as a lie. Roquentin is stunned by the other side of the *opposition* we have been describing and constructs a contrary conclusion.

The music functions not only to unravel his previous belief in adventures but to suggest another interpretation: real beginnings, if there are any, would be like the perfect virtual structure of the musical piece. As he revisits the oppositions in the music again and again, moving from notes as sheer event to notes as ideal transcendent structure and on to notes as sign and source of feeling and meaning, he finds (1) a motive beneath his ascensions, namely, the quest for real adventure; (2) the falseness and impossibility of such a quest; and (3) beneath the quest, a constant desire for "real beginnings," whatever they are. Finally,

there is a barely formed doubt beneath the desire—real beginnings belong to the ideal but non-existent world of literary, musical, or Platonic form.

In the midst of this detail, the form of the process is this: a deceiving self-awareness as one explores and experiences the artwork, its encoded messages, its contradictions, and its potential as the subject of creative interpretations.

3. THE LAST NIGHT IN THE BISTRO

The recording is not explicitly mentioned again in Roquentin's diary until near the end, after he has decided to leave the town in which he has been doing his research. In the meantime he has had more profound experiences of "Nausea," has briefly seen his former lover—in an unhappy encounter that ends their hopes—and has decided to abandon his book, unable to continue to believe that he can write true history. At the bistro, the waitress invites him to listen to the recording before he leaves for good:

... I don't feel too well disposed to listen to jazz. Still, I'm going to pay attention because, as Madeleine says, I'm hearing it for the last time: it [the record] is very old, even too old for the provinces; I will look for it in vain in Paris. (232)

Evidently, the music is still a lure after all this time. He is disdainful of the others in the café, who he imagines take comfort in the melody as if it were merely pleasant nourishment rather than uncompassionate in its purity. They are not in touch with the music's depth.

While he is lost in his depression and his perception of the world of things as ugly and "of the same material as I, a sort of messy suffering," the record begins. Rather than waiting for the chorus, he now finds crucial import in the first notes of the instrumental section; they are the bearers of a message:

Now there is this song on the saxophone. And I am ashamed. A glorious little suffering has just been born, an exemplary suffering. Four notes on the saxophone. They come and go, they seem to say: you must be like us, suffer in rhythm. All right! Naturally, I'd like to suffer that way, in rhythm, without complacency, without self-pity, with an arid purity. But is it my fault if the beer at the bottom of my glass is warm, if there are brown stains on the

mirror, if I am not wanted . . . ? No, they certainly can't tell me it's completely self-absorbed; like a scythe it has cut through the drab intimacy of the world and now it spins and all of us, Madeleine, the thick-set man, the patronne, myself, the tables, benches, the stained mirror, the glasses, all of us abandon ourselves to existence. . . . I am ashamed for myself and for what exists in front of it. (233)

The notes of the saxophone are an exemplary suffering. That is, they act as example of a way of being and at the same time express a kind of suffering.

We are reminded of Susanne Langer's theory that art is symbolic of human feeling: the form of the music is analogous to the forms of our feeling life. But beyond the expression of feeling, the notes are a moral example and an injunction: "You must suffer in rhythm like this!" Roquentin is ashamed in the presence of the example and defensive in his response to the prescription. Having said he doesn't want to indulge in self-pity, he does just that. So the work conveys a message, but at the same time, Roquentin says what it "seems to say." "There is a tension between the meaning of the song as a message-bearing, language-like structure, and an empty but tantalizing object of creative interpretation. Further, the "message" is an open-ended simile: "suffer like this."

The "little jewelled pain which spins around above the record" is not the imperfect melody heard on the scratched record, but the virtual sound composed of heard notes informed by the ideal structure of the piece. This distinction between Platonic form and physical sounds, implicit in Roquentin's first remarks about the piece, is now fully developed:

It [the melody "above" the record] does not exist. It is even an annoyance; if I were to get up and rip this record from the table which holds it, if I were to break it in two, I wouldn't reach it. It is beyond—always beyond something, a voice, a violin note. Through layers and layers of existence, it veils itself, thin and firm, and when you want to seize it, you find only existents, you butt against existents devoid of sense. It is behind them: I don't even hear it, I hear sounds, vibrations in the air which unveil it. It does not exist because it has nothing superfluous: it is all the rest which in relation to it is superfluous. It is. (233)

The virtual melody, distinguishable from the mere sounds of the record, apparently speaks of an impregnable, perfect order devoid of compromise. It is at the same time paradoxical; it both "is" and "does not exist"; and it appears indestructible, whereas before it had seemed so vulnerable.

The virtual melody holds us to account, enjoins us to a different and preferable way of life only dimly grasped. For Roquentin, it affords insight into yet another, more fundamental level of desire:

And I, too, wanted to be. That is all I wanted; this is the last word. At the bottom of all these attempts which seemed without bonds, I find the same desire again: to drive existence out of me, to rid the passing moments of their fat, to twist them, dry them, purify myself, harden myself, to give back at last the sharp, precise sound of a saxophone note. That could even make an apology: there was a poor man who got in the wrong world. He existed, like other people, in a world of public parks, bistros, commercial cities and he wanted to persuade himself that he was living somewhere else, behind the canvas of paintings, with the dogs of Tin-toretto, with Gozzoli's Florentines, behind the pages of books, with Fabrizio del Dongo and Julien Sorel, behind the phonograph records, with the long dry laments of jazz. . . .

I am a fool. (234)

This is a shattering moment of insight. The perfect moments ("adventures") he has sought are impossible moments of being in the world as if it were the untarnished realm of fictional virtual space.

But the music is still weaving its spell and expressing its exhortation:

And at that very moment, on the other side of existence, in this other world which you can see in the distance, but without ever approaching it, a little melody began to sing and dance: "You must be like me; you must suffer in rhythm."

The voice sings:

*Some of these days
You'll miss me, honey!...*
(234)

Until now, the insight that the "real" music is something apart from the scratched sounds of the phonograph has remained part idea and part immediate experience, but at this point, music presents itself with even greater force:

Someone must have scratched the record at that spot because it makes an odd noise. And there is something that clutches the heart: the melody is absolutely untouched by this tiny coughing of the needle on the record. It is so far—so far behind . . . behind the existence which falls from one present to the other, without a past, without a future, behind these sounds which decompose from day to day, peel off and slip towards death, the melody stays the same, young and firm, like a pitiless witness.

The voice is silent. The disc scrapes a little, then stops. (234–35)

Two movements are traceable through Roquentin's diary—a deepening insight into himself, his motives, desires, and varieties, and a more profound and total relationship to the music and particularly to its virtual dimension. In both cases, what he suspected and partially articulated in his early encounters becomes in the end a series of perceptions precisely articulated because profoundly experienced. The process takes time.

He asks Madeleine to begin the record again, "for the last time." While it plays, he imaginatively recreates in detail the story of its composition. An American Jew in a suffocating New York flat wrote the piece because he needed the money:

That is the way it happened. That way or another way, it makes little difference. That is how it was born. It is the worn-out body of this Jew with black eyebrows which it chose to create. . . . (235)

Meanwhile, the piece has arrived at the chorus:

She sings. So two of them are saved: the Jew and the Negress. Saved. . . .

The Negress sings: Can you justify your existence then? . . . I feel extraordinarily intimidated. . . . I am like a man frozen after a trek through the snow and who suddenly comes into a warm room. I think he would stay motionless near the door, still cold, and that slow shudders would go right through him. (236–37)

This surprising talk of salvation brings us to the last page of the diary. Roquentin conceives, dimly, of a new project and of going

on with renewed courage. It becomes apparent to the reader that something has changed, and to understand it, we must return to the music's prescription: suffer in rhythm. Suffering belongs to this world; the true rhythm belongs to that other world of form, aesthetic necessity, and invulnerability. What has plagued Roquentin throughout is an expression of and a demand for the union of the opposites. For the time being at least, he is neither plagued by contradictions nor desirous of escape to the ideal side of the opposition, but is glimpsing a possibility of integration beyond duality. He has in effect applied the entire contradiction to his life and has taken it as a goal of integration rather than an expression of an impossible choice.

Looking back, we can now see that since the moment of insight when he heard the saxophone notes exhorting him to suffer in rhythm and powerfully felt the distinction between the ideal form and the compromised execution of the music, all of his images are, like rhythmic suffering, images of the integration of opposites. For example, he experiences the music as a pitiless (purified) witness (of real world suffering), and he finds the composer's sweaty existence (his world) to be "moving" (partaking in an ideal grandeur), and he demands of himself that his life, tainted by "existence," be "justified" (a concept from the ideal realm of moral order). Finally, he once again glimpses the possibility of a distinction between adventure (contingent events) and "real adventure," something like salvation.

This vision promises, perhaps, a "new beginning" which, unlike his earlier "adventures," is not counterfeit:

Perhaps one day, thinking precisely of this hour, of this gloomy hour . . . , I shall feel my heart beat faster and say to myself: "That was the hour, when it all started." And I might succeed—in the past, nothing but the past—in accepting myself. (238)

B. FURTHER REMARKS

1. SPIRAL FORM: WHAT ROQUENTIN HAS GAINED

The example reveals a slow growth process which cannot be forced, and also suggests that a limited exposure to the ritual/ artwork would be useless. The ritual establishes certain general challenges to which there are an unlimited number of responses.

It can have its effect only when our life experience and our attention provide occasions during which the tensions inherent in the work can inform our thoughts and actions.

When the novel ends, Roquentin is once more claiming to be at a real beginning. But isn't this just the same old delusion returned? No, because now he has attended to his life in new ways, has noticed the underlying desire to be rid of ordinary existence, has seen through his story about his life of adventure, yet has had the deeper experience of the virtual features of the jazz piece. He has changed his life situation, deciding on a more appropriate kind of work, and has envisioned, if only briefly, the possibility of the integration of the ideal with the mundane realm.

We can conceive of Roquentin's experience with the record as having the form of a *spiral*: he revisits the same tensions, possibilities, claims over and over but each time with greater understanding.⁴ This spiral form could not be fully utilized if one continually amended a ritual or moved from one ritual to another rather than returning repeatedly to the same form.

2. PEDAGOGY

As we have noted, Jennings claims that the repetitive phases of ritual are pedagogical. During such phases, traditional knowledge, "knowledge gained elsewhere and otherwise," is being learned and paradigmatic actions are being extended. We can see now that this is only part of the story. To be sure, there is a pedagogical function: the music makes more graceful Roquentin's everyday action, and the lyrics perhaps convey a message about lost love compatible with Roquentin's present experience. More generally, the blues tradition can be viewed as an attempt to infuse life's suffering with an aesthetic order that both comforts and perhaps hints at a different realm of experience; music has an ideal structure which seeks incarnation into a contingent, fleeting, and inevitably flawed performance. We can think of all this as the wisdom of the tradition which was passed on to Sartre's protagonist.

But it should also be apparent that much of what Roquentin comes to know was not intended by the composer and the

4. For a related point, see also Buckley's discussion of the repeated enactment of Mandaeen baptism rituals (1989:33).

performer of the music, nor is it part of the wisdom of the blues tradition—nor, most importantly, is it a matter of simple extension by analogy of paradigmatic actions. Consider, for example, the general distinction between the Platonic realm of ideal pattern (the sequence of notes) and its imperfect embodiment in the sound issuing from the scratched record. This is a distinction that is of the essence of scored music, and it strikes Roquentin both conceptually and, later, with emotional force. But the knowledge of how to go on, which he acquires from his interaction with the piece, is the result of a creative confrontation between such features of the artwork and Roquentin's specific situation, history, and concerns.

Among the latter are his concern for philosophical clarity rather than emotional comfort, the story he has told himself about his adventures, his general twentieth-century angst, his underlying desire to escape contingency by insisting instead for a realm of ideal literary purity, and his misconceptions about real adventure and true beginnings. These very particular features of Roquentin's struggle issue in particular insights when he interacts with the record. Think, for example, of the complexity of the situation which fosters his first insight when he is responding to the music while watching the game of cards. If we could pursue the matter in finer detail, surely the content of his newly gained knowledge would be seen to be even more specific.

Yet couldn't each of these meanings and insights that are generated by the meeting of Roquentin and the music be viewed as analogical extensions of the basic features of the performance and its tradition as Jennings claims? We don't think so. Even if a convincing story to that effect could be told in each case, it could be told only after the fact and would have matters backwards. This was one of Davidson's central points: "The common error is to fasten on the contents of the thoughts [generated by one's interaction with the metaphor] and then to read these contents into the metaphor itself [as its intended message]" (1978:45). In the present case, the temptation is to read back into the music the contents Roquentin developed in the course of his listening as if they were mere analogical extensions of features of the piece.

Coming at it from the opposite direction: if these complicated processes can be called pedagogy in the wide sense, then it

must be noticed how far this extended sense diverges from Jennings's original meaning of "pedagogy." For the passing on of previously gained knowledge is a misleading description of what is really the creative generation of fresh insight.

3. AGENCY

There is a final, striking feature of Roquentin's description: he speaks often of the jazz recording as if it were an agent capable of action. He calls the song a "pitiless witness," "self-absorbed," not "compassionate." He claims it "chose" its composition to create it, and thereby, he was "saved." The recording imposes its own time on the bistro's customers; it interrogates and prescribes so that Roquentin feels ashamed in its presence and constrained to try to justify his life henceforth. It will become apparent, in chapter 10 below, that Roquentin's treatment of the musical form as a surrogate and supernatural person, a virtual agent, is not a mere accident of his over-active imagination, but a sign of a special role that rituals can play.

It is appropriate that we now apply our interpretive theory to a religious ritual. The example will be the Zoroastrian Afnagan ceremony. After a brief description of this frequently performed ritual, we will attempt to elucidate the noetic function of its repeated enactment.

A. A RITUAL OF BLESSINGS

As noted, the Atrmagān is a ceremony of offerings to the Lord of Wisdom (Ahura Mazda) and his spirit creation which invites their blessings on particular individuals, deceased or living, or on the community as a whole. The ceremony seeks to enhance the connection between the physical world and the unseen realm of reality.¹ It consists primarily of three selections from the Avestan scriptures intoned by two ritual priests. During each of these recitations, the priests exchange sets of flowers, a few at a time.

At the commencement of the ritual, the two priests, wearing white robes of organ dy over their white garments, are seated facing each other across a Persian carpet partially covered with a white cloth (see Fig. 4). Between them are the ritual fire and a number of silver trays containing a variety of offerings: sandal-wood, frankincense, fruits and flowers, eggs and bread, and water, sharbat, milk, and wine.

Before the exchange, eight flowers—either jasmine, marigolds, red and white roses, or other fragrant flowers of the season—are taken from a tray and carefully laid out in two columns of three each with two below (see Appendix 2, p. 168). The assistant priest stands to receive and to return the flowers from the chief priest in groups of one to three and in a prescribed order. This interchange is repeated with a different set of eight blossoms during each of the three Avestan recitations. The fire,

1. See chap. 5, pp. 55–57 above, for a discussion of connectedness.

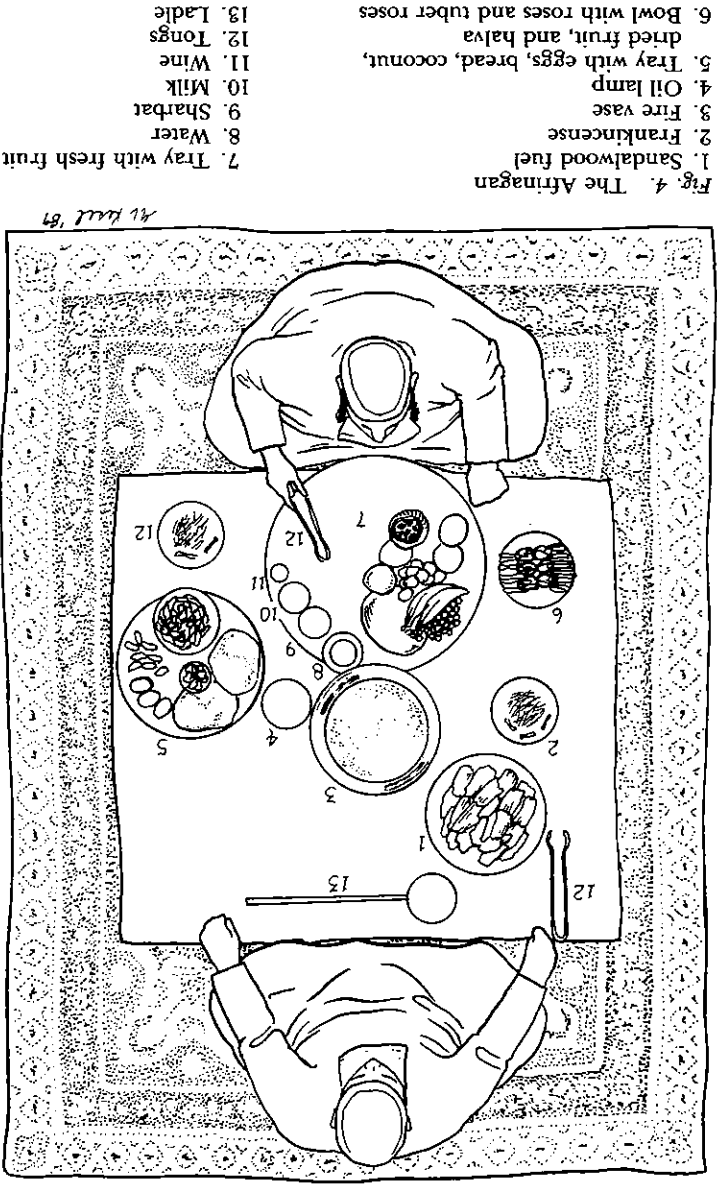


Fig. 4. The Atimagan

the colorful flowers, and the trays of offerings present striking visual images; the chants, simultaneous with the exchanges, contain praise for "the radiance and glory of the Lord of Wisdom" and for those who practice "good thoughts, good words, and good deeds."

B. THE FLOWER EXCHANGE AS VISUAL METAPHOR

With this ritual before us, we are now able to demonstrate that it is possible, even plausible, for the Dastur to have gained knowledge new to the tradition by means of processes in some ways like those evidenced by Roquentin. We will not be relying on a daily account of change like that provided by Sartre's diary; instead, we will analyze gestures of the flower exchange in order to display their powers to convey and invite interpretation. Dastur Kotwal's comments about his ritual practice will be an important source of validation. Needless to say, our analysis will not have the narrative power so evident in Sartre's work, and it will remain very much on the surface, compared to the subtle acquisition of wisdom evidenced by the Dastur himself.

1. LURING

A priest trained in the tradition brings [to the ritual] an attitude which intuitively finds beauty and grace. . . .

—DASTUR KOTWAL
A Guide to the Zoroastrian Religion

The flower exchange ceremony initially attracts the viewer or participant by its beauty as an image of abundance. The flowers—typically indicative of fecundity, ephemerality, and beauty—are set amidst a rich sensory background: a patterned rug, silver trays laden with fruits and prepared foods, vessels of milk and wine, a living fire, and fragrant sandalwood and frankincense (see Fig. 4). Against this rather elaborate background, the gestures of the flower exchange stand out, for they are highly articulated and simple. They have a rhythm interspersed with pauses which create elegant, posed images exhibiting a kind of virtual power and playing a role similar to the ideal form of Roquentin's jazz music. When enacted attentively, the gestures have an aesthetic richness and necessity to them, rhythmically and visually. Thus

they are both fitting actions and evocative images calling for interpretation. Furthermore, the interaction of the gestures with the abundant setting promises more intricate meanings. To display this complexity, we will attend to a single moment when the standing priest exchanges flowers with the seated priest (see Fig. 5). The ritual exchange begins with the chief priest's picking up two roses and handing one to the standing priest. While each holds a rose, the standing priest chants an Avestan *manthra* which exalts Ahura Mazda as radiant and glorious. The chief priest then joins him in chanting the last word (*afriamti*), "I bless." With this utterance, the Lord of Wisdom's blessings are given, and, as Dastur Kotwal explains,

the *manog* [invisible] and *gētīg* [visible] worlds join right here in the ritual, and you feel the benign presence of God Himself in the ceremony. (Boyd 1989)

This heightened moment initiates an exchange of flowers performed in the following way. The seated priest places his left hand on the flower tray of offerings, which is itself touching the fire vase, and the standing priest sets the end of a brass ladle held in his left hand to the edge of the fire vase. Thus the priests begin to establish one side of a circuit-like connection between themselves, the fire, and the offerings. When they touch their right hands together in the exchange of flowers, a complete connection of the circuit is established. Intoning the Avestan words which mean "good thoughts, good words, and good deeds," they exchange the flowers in groups of three. This ritual act, repeated three times, constitutes the heart of the ceremony. The physical gesture as embedded in the ritual process is an integration of movement, visual figure, *manthra*, setting, and interpretive meanings. It has the power to create a special moment, to exist, as it were, in a purer dimension.²

To recapitulate, the ceremony acts as a lure in a twofold way: through the direct appeal of its images of abundance and through the promised depth of meaning supplied by the

2. See also Kappaport's discussion of the liminal period in which the performers participate fully in the ritual present and realize a "nondiscursive, affective and experiential aspect. . . . [of] the 'numinous'" (1979:213).

interaction of simple gesture and complex environment. In the final analysis, however, the compelling force of the ritual is more than aesthetic; it is the lure of the opportunity to give sustained attention to ultimate matters. This brings us to the question of focus.

2. FOCUSING

The focus of the whole ritual cycle is the establishment of righteousness. Dastur Kotwal states:

The pious [priest] seeks throughout his life to develop a disciplined personality which keeps in constant contact with the *menog* reality so that righteousness may always be with him and . . . prevail in all his thoughts, words and actions. (Kotwal and Boyd 1977:44)

The manthric utterances both at the beginning and at the conclusion of the ceremony proclaim "righteousness is good." Likewise, the central ritual gesture of exchanging flowers in sets of three is performed while the priest intones the three-fold phrase "good thoughts, good words, and good deeds." All this is done while the priest maintains a connecting linkage with the fire, which itself exemplifies righteousness. Thus the exchanges are located at the focus of the performance and are set within manthric proclamations of righteousness, as well as being framed by utterances of righteousness.

But, as Koquenetin discovers, it is one thing to pursue an ideal, and another to implement it. Just as he seeks a meaningful integration of the ideal with the ordinary, which promises a new beginning, so the celebrant of the Afrinagan seeks to instantiate right-relatedness in everyday life. The priest's role is to be an exemplification of righteousness. The repetition of the flower exchange maintains the focus in two ways: it presents a vivid, patterned image of proper connection which directs us to the meaning of right relation, and it keeps alive an open-ended search for the realization of righteousness in daily life by providing a metaphorical frame which both guides and invites interpretation.

Since the Afrinagan is the most commonly repeated ritual in the Zoroastrian community, one can imagine its having a significant effect on the participants. The stabilizing focus

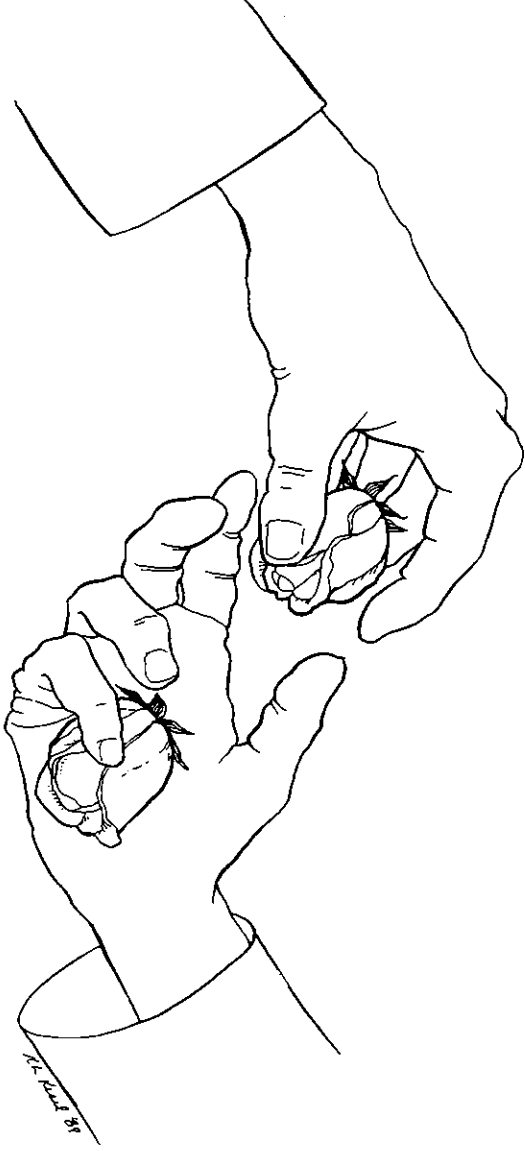


Fig. 5. The Flower Exchange

provided by its continual reenactment enables it to become an instrument for unlimited transformation.

3. CONVEYING

The ritual unfolds itself when we go deeply into it and try to understand it thoroughly. . . . we understand more and more every moment. . . .

—DASTUR KOTWAL

We have already noted some of the meanings conveyed to the Zoroastrian practitioner by the Afrinagan. The flower exchange is interpreted as indicating the soul's journey from this world to the next, or more generally, it represents the proper connection between this visible world (*geīg*) and the invisible (*menog*) realms.³ Likewise, there are universal meanings associated with flowers: abundance, renewal, and seasonal rhythms, all of which can be related symbolically to the theological context of the ritual.⁴

But as a compressed visual metaphor, the ritual gestures convey many more meanings than might be expected. In Robert Bly's terms, the metaphor "brings up to consciousness forgotten analogies" and "marks the before unperceived relations of things." Consonant with this view, we can uncover a four-term analogy by delineating its most general features as they are embedded in the theological context.

Besides the two agents involved in the exchange of roses, there are two gestures, giving and receiving. The four-term analogy, then, is this: the chief priest (A1) is to the assistant priest (A2) as the gesture of giving a flower (G1) is to the return gesture of receiving a flower (G2); that is, A1 is to A2 as G1 is to G2. Agent A1's connectedness or communication with agent A2 is like the transaction with the flowers.

The agents, A1 and A2, are not only two priests; they can represent other individuals or groups in the community and can stand in either of two worlds. Consequently, we take either A1 or A2 to be any of the following:

3. See, e.g., Modi 1922: 1986:376–77.
4. Under the category of conveying, we include what Kappaport refers to as indexical and canonical transmission of messages (1979:182).

- (a) the priest himself
- (b) another (named) believer
- (c) the historical Zoroastrian community
- (d) the future community
- (e) the world in this present time
- (f) the presently dead on their journey in the *menog* realm
- (g) the *menog* realm of guardian spirits (*fravashis*)
- (h) the source of all good creation (Ahura Mazda)

With respect to the gestural side of the analogy, G1 and G2, we can begin by isolating two moments: connectedness and exchange. At one point in the ceremony, the priests hold a flower in common, an act which is an image of simple connectedness. The exchange itself (see Fig. 5) can be viewed formally in at least two ways. As a straightforward interchange, something (X) is offered and then received; or more broadly, the flower exchange completes a larger circuit formed when the priests touch the fire vase and tray. Seen in the latter way, the exchange of red roses is like a spark leaping between the right hands of the priests, which are charged by their connectedness with the fire vase and the offerings.

Both interchanges can be further interpreted as a transformation: the flowers return "consecrated," according to Dastur Kotwal, and thus are essentially altered (X returns as Y). So the four possibilities of this side of the analogy are connection, interchange, circuit completion, and transformation. Furthermore, the flowers themselves can be viewed as representing things (such as offerings), events (good thoughts, words, and deeds), or living beings (priests, souls, guardian spirits). When these alternative interpretations of the gestures are combined with the many roles the priests can represent, the analogy generates hundreds of possible similes.

To take but one example: let the first priest represent himself and the second priest stand for the present Zoroastrian community. Let the flowers denote good deeds, and let their exchange signify the transformative completion of a circuit connected with the fire. Given these interpretations, the gestures of the flower exchange symbolize any proper interaction, or exchange of deeds, between a priest and his community. Note that any such interaction requires a right relation with the source of

Wisdom, exemplified in the ritual by the fire. The deeds involved in the relation between the priest and the community are like the sparks connecting the priests at the moment of consecration of the flowers. How this simile is to be unpacked further has to be discovered by the participants in the specific context of their lives.

When such an ideal is repeatedly put before us, we may find ourselves responding as Sartre's Roquentin does when he hears the four notes of the jazz piece intimate to him that he should "be like us [the notes]," and "suffer in rhythm." That is, the ritual image may similarly challenge us to "be like this" in our relations with others and our connections with the spirit realm.

These many possible meanings are in no way explicitly and systematically explored by the practitioner. Rather, they are *available* for exploration; and when they are actualized and applied, it is plausible to say they are part of what the ritual conveys: the extension of "knowledge gained elsewhere."

Dastur Kotwal summarizes the ritual's power of conveying and its relation to simile:

You learn many things from rituals as you go on enacting them. . . . In a way intricacies are developed from one act to another, and you see, oh, this is like this! How wonderful it is. (Boyd 1989)

4. OPPOSING

When you try to understand a ritual thoroughly well, you find that was not accurate, this was accurate.

—DASTUR KOTWAL

The flower exchange also offers us *opposing* possibilities—namely, all those contrasts that can be generated from the four-term analogies mentioned in the previous section. One may be working consciously or unconsciously with the metaphor of simile exchange, for example, only to find in the next moment the relevance of the contrasting figure of transformation.

It may be recalled that Roquentin's diary is rich in descriptions of such shifts. Initially he is comforted by his perception of the saxophone notes as exemplifying a necessary causal order. Later, these same notes become challenging moral exhortations to "suffer in rhythm." Similarly, the flower exchange may be

perceived at one moment as a practical guide to the correct way of being, and in another moment as a transcendent ideal of right connectedness, seemingly impossible to achieve yet quietly subverting moral complacency.

In both the literary and ritual settings, such oppositions arise from a multiplicity of meanings engendered by the basic images. Such oppositions may not only involve moves to contrasting interpretations, but may also result in more halting moments in which interpretations unravel or even cease. The flower exchange gesture may stop interpretation, for it is a thing/event first and foremost, a gesture prior to signs and without inherent signification.

Here we have come to a more fundamental opposition: that between the ritual gesture as expressing analogical relations and as being a bare event without decipherable intention. Recall how Roquentin is stunned by the notes' reassertion of themselves as a more profound and total relationship to the music, particularly to its virtual dimension. In the case of Zoroastrian practice, the flower exchange as pure event is not only a meaningless gesture opposed to interpretation, but an ideal form or shining event possessing virtual qualities inviting deeper awareness. Dastur Kotwal hints at this most basic level of opposition when he states that the ritual act is prior to theology:

the principal importance of [ritual] lies in the concrete physical . . . activities themselves, i.e., in the ceremonial acts of the ritual [not in the interpretations of them]. (Kotwal and Boyd 1977:33)

5. POTENTIATING

Though, in the final analysis, the ritual gesture of the flower exchange remains an event, not a sign, and is therefore empty of meaning in and of itself, as a bare event it can also be viewed as a hermetic image which invites interpretation. In this sense it is full of potential, a dominant, active event which is the central point of the ritual and which continually invites a response from us. Thus the gesture is both an indecipherable mystery and an inexhaustible source of meaning.

5. This incongruency between the ideal and the real is the central opposition in Jonathan Z. Smith's theory of ritual (1987).

recitation and of the different dramatic roles available to the priests, the effects of the other artistic forms involved in the ritual were not developed.

Thus, various other dimensions of ritual performance—for example, the interactions among the different art forms employed in the ritual—have yet to be fully explored. It should be apparent, however, that such features as the rhythm and internal repetitions of the performance, the visual composition of the carpet and utensils, the aural effects of the *manthra*, and the dramatic episodes in which the priests engage in a ritual handshake⁶ greatly multiply opportunities for both reinforcement of and opposition to the gestures so far described. Opposition, for example, can occur as easily between two art forms as between two spaces. The meaning of a poetic, manthric utterance can be in opposition to a simultaneous physical movement, such as standing up.

D. KNOWLEDGE AND TRUTH

What then is the test of truth? Unlike Jennings's criterion of truth, which involves correspondence between the ritual action and "ways of being and acting in the world," truth in the second stance will be evidenced in the life of the priest. He will live more righteously and will transmit his newly discovered knowledge by word and deed to the community. In Dastur Kotwal's terms,

the true priest, whose life is dedicated to the performance of these rituals, becomes an instrument of their effectiveness, and the radiance of the holy, that divine glory which nourishes life and progress and benefit to the world and mankind, shines from him. He, like the ritual event . . . itself, contributes through his daily ceremonial activities, to the increase, prosperity and salvation of the world. (Kotwal and Boyd 1977:44)

The Dastur also hints at a criterion of falsity:

When you see two priests you can immediately distinguish from their very faces, that this priest is a lustrous priest, he has got glory on his face . . . and the other priest, he is a hypocrite . . . you can find from the face of the priest himself. (Boyd and Darrow 1982)

6. See below, pp. 172–73, for further references to the ritual handshake.

If the gesture is to function as a potentiating source, however, one must approach it with unconstrained attention, i.e., in the spirit of right repetition. As we have argued, right repetition requires something of both priest and ritual. The priest must look at the ritual afresh, setting aside prior interpretations. The ritual must be a horizon rather than an enclosure, in this instance containing pure gestures in virtual space acting as hermetic images. When there is both attention and uninterpreted gesture, the result is likely to be new insight or, in Roquentin's words, a "real beginning." This is not a matter of conveying old ideas to new persons, not transplanation. Rather, the priest must be passionately attentive to questions which remain open—ultimate questions, such as what is righteousness? One can always discover something new and detailed about lived righteousness. Dastur Kotwal states dramatically:

When you approach the ritual fresh, it is alive. . . . You are like a phoenix, resurrected every time—out of the ashes, you grow. (Boyd 1989)

The flower-exchange gesture thus functions as a liminal horizon which confronts us with indecipherable mystery. The gesture continually lures the attentive person who is open to the ultimate questions of life, and engenders a focus on the question of what it is to live righteously. It offers patterns of right-related thoughts, words, and deeds conveyed by the tradition, yet it encompasses an open field of contrasting approaches and applications of these matters to one's life. Repeated encounters with the same ritual involve one in a spiraling circuit alternating between the poles of meaning and mystery.

The priest, for the thousandth time and like the priests before him, picks up a flower, places it with disciplined precision in the palm of his companion-priest, dedicating himself anew to good thoughts, words, and deeds.

C. OTHER DIMENSIONS

To avoid unnecessary complexity, the foregoing analysis was restricted to the gestural component of the flower exchange, including the interaction among its physical, virtual, and symbolic features. Except for mention of a few phrases from the manthric

These remarks show as well where new knowledge is lodged, in contrast to the first stance, which claims that knowledge gained is reflected in the amended ritual action. Here, the new discovery finds expression in a priest's more enlightened actions and countenance. It may also be reflected in changes in the theological interpretations of a ritual. Kotwal says:

If anything is likely to change, it is not ritual, but theology. Theology is not one and the same from scholar to scholar—so many positions, . . . so many different views. (Boyd 1989)

COMPANIONABLE FORM

Chapter 10

Thus far we have characterized a second stance toward ritual practice that is distinguishable from Jennings's view. We have shown that the functions of unchanging ritual repetition are not confined to pedagogy, and, employing examples from poetry, literature, and religious ritual, we have suggested that it is *possible* to acquire knowledge new to the tradition via unchanging ritual practice. One final claim is to be made from the point of view of the second stance: not only is it possible to gain knowledge by means of unvarying reenactment, but it is *necessary* that one be committed to preserving the ritual unchanged. We will mount our argument with the help of one last metaphor: ritual as "companionable form."

A. EXEMPLARS OF VIRTUE

Recall Aristotle's advice to any who would be moral: find a moral person whom you can observe and emulate. If this advice is helpful, it is because (a) it is easier to identify a good person than to discover what is good, and (b) the good life requires a complex balance which goes beyond any possible ethical rule book, so one must watch goodness in action to grasp its subtlety. Now, might it not be the case that ritual artworks, themselves capable of subtle suggestion and open to interpretation and multiple interpretation, can play a role similar to that of Aristotle's good person? For, as we have seen, rituals can both enjoin us to certain tasks and values and, at the same time, invite us to discover, in the light they cast, more adequate ways of being. We can further develop these ideas by drawing from a recent work in iconology.

B. SEARCH FOR THE RIGHT IMAGE

Like Bly, W. J. T. Mitchell, in his book *Iconology*, investigates the powers of images. He points out that we are often left with the

unenlightening choice between seeing images as purely aesthetic objects (and thus as partially disarmed) or as dangerous and bewitching idols from which we must try to be free. Mitchell asks if there might not be some middle ground between these two extremes.¹

Unlike as it may seem, he proposes that *totems* can fill the desired role midway between aesthetic objects and idols. This proposal seems unlikely because totems themselves are typically thought to be primitive, bewitching fetishes. But Mitchell wants to draw on a more sophisticated view of their role:

Anthropology offers us an example of such an image in the notion of the *totem*. Totems are not idols or fetishes, not objects of worship, but "companionable forms" (to use Coleridge's phrase) which the viewer may converse with, cajole, bully, or cast aside. They are, in Sir James Frazer's words, "an imaginary brotherhood established on a footing of perfect equality between a group of people on the one side and a group of things on the other side." (1986:114)

C. RITUALS AS COMPANIONS

Clearly, not every claim in the foregoing paragraph is applicable to the present case. Zoroastrian ritual images are not cajoled, for example, or bullied, or readily cast aside. Perhaps Mitchell's statement fares a little better as a description of Roquentin's experience. Nevertheless, we can extract from these leads a promising idea that is compatible with our thesis: a person or a community can interact with inanimate objects, events, and images—with ritual, for example—as if with companions or guides.

The practitioners of ritual and the set of rituals might indeed compose something like a "brotherhood established on a footing of equality." It would be a complex interaction, making possible search, discovery, and transformation. In this way, the

1. Mitchell states: "It is hard to resist . . . the temptation to speculate about what sort of image might fill the blank space our culture creates between aesthetic objects and idols." Further to delineate what he is looking for, Mitchell draws upon Wordsworth's concept of "living images of imagination" (to be distinguished from dead idols), and he invokes Socrates's notion of "provocative" images which encourage fruitful contemplation of the Good and the Beautiful (1986:114).

notion of Aristotle's good person can be extended to ritual actions, particularly to visual metaphors which command our attention, provoke our investigations, and defeat our overly cognitive and premature answers. Rituals are, in part, exemplars of virtue.

It is striking in this regard to find Sartre's protagonist characterizing the jazz music as virtually an agent who can witness Roquentin's actions, shame him, impose its rhythm on his gestures, and even challenge him to justify his existence. We can also find confirmation of the idea of ritual as agent within the Zoroastrian tradition. For an orthodox Zoroastrian, the sacred fire is the son of God, an exemplification of the divine energy that infuses the *menog* and *getig* realms. The perception of the fire as a being is very close to, and a fine example of, the perception of ritual objects and events as companionable forms.

Dastur Kotwal was intrigued by the term "companionable form," and in answer to the question "Would it be right to say that rituals for you have been a companion in your life?" he replied:

Yes, they have sustained me, and their effect will last until the end of my life. (Boyd 1989)²

D. WHY RITUALS CANNOT BE CHANGED

Such anthropomorphic talk of companions may seem overstated, but we see it as an attempt to illuminate the complex relation between practitioner and ritual. The ritual can be felt as a benign, leading presence; it can interrogate us and be in turn questioned by us; it can be a stern teacher, a model of purity opposing our actions and habits. In being ideal, it is an exemplification of the Ideal, a virtual incarnation of the Most High, rather than a mere sign of the sacred.³ Thus, in honoring it, the

2. After we had formulated the major features of the second stance, based on Dastur Kotwal's views and practices, one of us summarized the essential ideas of this analysis for the Dastur in a conversation and requested his frank evaluation. His favorable responses validated, in our minds, our interpretation of his position as a ritual priest.

3. It may also be the case, following Kappaport (1979:182, 209) that invariance of a ritual may be an icon of the seeming changelessness of the canonical information that it incorporates. Thus, invariant practice may mirror different social, ethical, and religious "facts" in different traditions.

ritual companion, one honors God. And how is it to be honored? In terms of the second stance, it is honored by means of the priests' unwavering attention and precise execution, and by their *transmitting the ritual unchanged*.

This brings us to the completion of our argument: why, from the perspective of the second stance, is it of the essence of ritual that it be repeated unchanged? In most traditional theology, unchanging Reality is distinguished from varying descriptions and interpretations of it. We believe that such a division between the unknowable and the knowable God is mirrored by the distinction between the ritual as ideal, unchanging companion and the ever-changing responses to and interpretations of it. The second stance we have been describing is thus at bottom the expression of an attitude of reverence and humility toward an unchanging reality underlying all change. This stance expresses a feeling of awe and vulnerability before the unknowably sacred, and it displays a moral commitment to honor that reality above our own conceptions of it. In Zoroastrian terms, such rituals acknowledge the ontological priority of the Most High, the one who is "invisible among invisibles." In addition, within the Atrianagan itself, the distinction between the unvarying source of Wisdom and our conceptions of it is reflected in the difference we have described between the flower exchange as bare event and as interpreted event.

Jennings's view is also evidence of an important attitude which, in contrast, seeks to acknowledge responsibility for our conceptions of the sacred by the continual emendation of ritual practice to reflect our changing knowledge. From this perspective, ritual is made for and by human beings, not vice versa, and the priest is to the companionable form as an improvisational dancer is to the dance.⁴

Of course, one operating from the second stance will see the danger of hubris in any attitude which advocates changing ritual to fit our variable conceptions of and responses to the holy. The integrity of the ritual masterpiece will be threatened

4. This stance may also reflect any ideology which has a more process-oriented view of reality, such as contemporary Whiteheadian thought or the philosophy of the ninth-century Zoroastrian writer Mardan Farukh, with whom Dastur Koriw disagrees on fundamentals.

The danger inherent in the second stance is that the commitment to preserving ritual unchanged may be extended to other aspects of the religion, resulting in an unbending attitude toward all traditional laws and practices. However, our characterization of ritual invariance is logically independent of such a strict conservative view of other facets of the tradition.⁵

E. CONCLUSION

We are now in a position to highlight the important features of the two stances and the major issues separating Jennings's position from our own, as well as briefly to address some of the methodological issues involved in the relation between practitioner and investigator.

Among the cited participants in the dialogue we have been tracing, there is rough agreement on the facts: rituals exhibit

5. It is true that there is a connection between the commitment to maintain ritual practice unchanged and the commitment to the traditional laws of the religion; that is, a bridge can be constructed reaching from unchanging ritual practice to the claims of tradition, be they embodied in ritual hymns or church law. Nevertheless, what we are claiming is, first, that an unchanging ritual practice, particularly when viewed as gesture, image, metaphor, etc., can serve a noetic function. This claim is independent of questions about how and whether religious law can be amended. Second, we claim that in the case of traditional Zoroastrianism this commitment to no change mirrors the theological belief that this world is the result of the action of an unchanging God, and it celebrates the stable source of the world of change. It is a short step from this second formation to Dastur Koriw's claims about, for example, who is a Zoroastrian and who is not (*Parsiana* 1990:27-29, 30-33), for the traditional distinction can be claimed to be direct from God and thus not open to emendation by men. But even in this case, we must remember that our remarks also connect the mystery of the flower gesture (its potentiating and opposing functions) to the *unsayability* of the most sacred. And religious law belongs to the sayable side of things. So, though it may not happen, it would be logically possible to preserve the gestures and order and words of a ritual from age to age while amending theology and law. Koriw himself admits this when he claims that ritual is prior to theological interpretation. The most radical example of our thesis would be, say, a group following that all other features of the religious practice and surrounding moral and legal rules can be changed. In this view, ritual is a strict order surrounding an unbounded mystery (e.g., the flower exchange as uninterpreted gesture); that is, it is liminal, rather than rigid, at the core. What is rigid is the maintenance and protection of the core gesture.

considerable diachronic change, yet their performance is more or less invariant. The problem is how best to interpret and weigh these facts.

Drawing evidence from his own Christian tradition and recent cross-cultural scholarship, Jennings is impressed with the extent to which ritual performance is developed, elaborated, and revised. Applying this perspective to the question of rituals' noetic function, he insists that change is essential to the acquisition of knowledge. Jennings employs metaphors from both science and art: Kuhnian paradigms and experimental drama.

On the other hand, our explication of Dastur Koral's stance leads us to see invariance as the key to rituals' noetic function. Unlike Rappaport (see above, p. 61), we are not claiming that the more or less invariant performance is a defining characteristic of ritual, but that the *commitment* to invariance is a necessary condition for the acquisition of knowledge. The dominant model to characterize this stance has been the notion of unchanging masterpiece whose powers are delineated in terms of the two poles of metaphor. Had we chosen a model from the philosophy of science, we could have said that ritual is akin to the *a priori* dimensions of scientific theories rather than

to the more easily changed empirical aspects.⁶ We have also characterized the two stances from within (emic) and from without (etic). From the emic point of view, the practitioners of each stance display two contrasting attitudes, the one taking responsibility for and celebrating our quest for fitting action, the other displaying an attitude of reverence and humility toward a fundamental unchanging reality.

Etcally, the stances exhibit two contrasting theoretical generalizations. This fact can be clarified with the help of a simple analogy from the history of science: the two different scientific views of the pendulum. For an Aristotelian, a pendulum is a constrained weight seeking its natural point of rest; hence it is expected to stop, ultimately. The Newtonian view, on the other hand, is that a pendulum is a periodic device which will remain in motion except for the interference of friction. It is as if in the one view the

6. This would be the case particularly if the *a priori* is interpreted in this modern sense: those claims are *a priori* towards which we adopt an attitude of obstinancy.

pendulum intends to come to rest, and in the other that it intends to remain in motion.⁷

Similarly for views of ritual: Jennings sees the practitioner's intention, explicit or implicit, to carry out an exploration for more appropriate action, whereas we see an intention, explicit in Koral's case, to maintain the ritual unchanged while amending his life in relation to it. Thus, it is as if within the first stance the ritual "intends" to change, and within the second stance it "intends" to remain changeless.

Analogous to our discussion of the two poles of metaphor, we see the two stances as defining the field in which ritual operates. Though incompatible, neither stance can be eliminated without distorting the facts of invariance within diachronic change.

Finally, a word about method. Brian Smith states a relevant warning about the "illusion" of invariance:

Such an illusion, necessary for maintaining the continuity and orthodoxy of religious traditions, is not one that is appropriately replicated in scholarship about these traditions. . . . (1989:222)

Smith warns against the mistake of adopting the practitioners' emic self-image, of uncritically accepting the others' theory about what they do rather than *seeing* what they do. It is, of course, to guard against such distortions that students of ritual distinguish between emic and etic perspectives and self-consciously employ their own theoretical constructs. This challenge to characterize perceptively the practitioner's knowledge by means of our own knowledge is common to such diverse fields as anthropology, documentary film-making, history, and literary criticism.⁸

But another danger also arises from this challenge: that one will fail to *see*, adequately and more fully, both the ritual itself and the practitioner's intentions, because of biases introduced by one's paradigm. For example, from within the theory of the first stance, some important features are likely to be invisible: the function served by invariance to mirror the unchanging

7. It was Galileo who brought about this shift in perception (See Kuhn 1962: 1966:117-18).

8. See Deleuze 1989:149-55.

sacred and the practitioner's commitment to invariance as a gesture of respect for that feature of reality.

A similar point can be made in terms of empirical evidence.

If a ritual practitioner claims that his rituals have not changed significantly over time, while we have solid evidence to the contrary, it is tempting to think that he is mistaken in a wholesale manner about the nature of his ritual practice. So it may be in certain cases. But the situation we are investigating is more elaborate, because part of the evidence with which we are confronted is about the practitioner's perceived duty to keep the rituals unchanged.⁹ This evidence is as legitimate as evidence about how the Yasna ceremony, for example, has changed over the centuries. The challenge is to develop a theoretical description which does justice to both kinds of data, and it seems to us a mistake to ignore the former evidence or to relegate it along with other of the practitioner's beliefs about the stability of ritual to the category of illusion or myth. Or, if we do wish to regard the set of beliefs about how ritual does not and must not change as part of the celebrant's "myth," it is that very myth we must articulate¹⁰ if we are going to do full justice to explaining

In this study we have sought to give invariance its proper weight by employing aesthetic categories, recognizing the contingent, historical nature of ritual traditions, while sympathetically tracing the practitioner's emic self-image. But we have intentionally maintained the two stances so that the blindness of each will be exposed by the other, since each conceptual frame-work both reveals and covers up. We have held up to ritual a screen generated by the concepts of masterpiece and horizon. Jennings looks through screens of historical change, empirical

9. Part of the complexity is related to (1) possible disagreements about which changes in ritual practice are essential and which are inessential, and (2) the difference between the claims that ritual *has not* changed and those that it *ought not* to change.

10. For a different but related concern, see El Guindat's *The Myth of Ritual*, which contains a thoughtful account of her innovative use of an informant as, in effect, a fellow ethnographer. "Myth" in her title refers to the account of a ritual tradition by an informant trained "to the point where he or she can generalize from knowledge about ritual." Such an account "would be a descriptive synthesis or ethnography that is not dissimilar from that produced by a trained field-worker except in the source and nature of knowledge: a native's intuition versus an outsider's inference" (1986:4).

disconfirmation, and improvisation. Dastur Kowal's screen is the Zoroastrian tradition. We have juxtaposed these screens with a faith well described by John Wisdom:

... any classificatory system is a net spread on the blessed manifold of the individual and blinding us not to all but to too many of its varieties and continuities. A new system will do the same but not in just the same ways. So that in accepting *all* the systems their blinding power is broken, their revealing power becomes acceptable; the individual is restored to us, not isolated as before we used language, not in a box as when language mastered us, but in "creation's chorus." (1953; 1964:119)

SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING METHODOLOGICAL REMARKS

In résumé, we have argued the following:

Whatever else it may be, a ritual is akin to an artistic masterpiece. An artistic masterpiece is that which rewards attention over time. Those who bring the ritual repeatedly into existence, by their careful performances, may count themselves fortunate to stand regularly in the presence of its virtual power and to be engaged thereby in processes of learning and discovery for which it acts as guide. They may be certain as well that it is a guide like no other—one that rightly takes precedence over the oscillations of theological doctrine. The real coherence is in ritual.

Beginning with our words and ending with those of Dastur Kowal, this brief résumé purports to express the practitioner's understanding of his ancient craft, but in the modern vocabulary of "artistic masterpiece," "virtual power," "guide," and "knowledge." It concurrently displays and covers over the complex conversation between practitioners and theorists with respect to a ritual practice they both perceive (but as performers and as observers) and both interpret (but from very different vantage points).

As a summary and an illustration of the complexities of method, the opening statement serves well to encapsulate this chapter: a recapitulation of our argument and its results, and a discussion of some of the rewards and the dangers of theory.

1. See above, pp. 62 and 136-39, for related issues.

2. By continually returning to descriptions of the interactions among the physical, virtual, and meaning spaces of the many arts involved in ritual, we have emphasized the artistic "languages" of ritual—or *how* ritual does what it does. What ritual does in general is a much broader set of issues than we have dealt with; our concentration has been on ritual's power to integrate and its noetic function. For this reason alone, our study, though theoretical, is not a complete, general theory of ritual. We have sometimes referred to it instead as an *approach*.

Part two distinguishes two of the possible stances the practitioner may take toward ritual practice. The first stance, derived from Theodore Jennings, takes ritual to be knowledge of the body gained by means of the body (movement). This *sui generis* "body knowledge" can then be extended analogically to the practitioner's actions outside the ritual. Variation in ritual practice is an expected result of this search for fitting action. The second stance takes *invariant* ritual practice to be a tool opened by means of the analysis of the ritual image from the side of language. A delineation of the *powers* of poetic images is

In part one the emphasis is on the often-neglected virtual features of ritual images. That ritual can provide integrative environments—setting community activities in the contexts of the Good, the True, the Beautiful, and the Sacred—is the result of the ways in which the virtual power of images is internally connected with their physical and linguistic features.

Ritual is not merely one among the arts, for it serves extra-artistic ends from within socio-religious milieux. Nevertheless, in order to provide yet another avenue for the understanding of ceremonial activities whose complexities elude any one perspective, we have characterized ritual practice as a multi-dimensional artistic activity. Not only does it simultaneously employ various art forms—from the visual to the dramatic to the literary arts—but each of these arts is in turn productive of a unique kind of *image* comprising physical, virtual, and language-like components or "spaces." Thus, throughout this account, what ritual *does* is explained by a detailing of the complex interplay among the arts and their spaces.²

A. RECAPITULATION 1. RETRACING THE PATH: WHAT RITUAL IS AND WHAT IT DOES

generated from the encounter between two theories of metaphor. It is shown that these powers extend as well to other ritual images, particularly the gestural image, and that they make possible the communication and creation of knowledge. Finally, the application of these interpretive categories to fictional and actual rites makes clear that the powers of metaphor arise from the interplay of the physical, semantic, and virtual features of the various arts employed in a ritual. From the perspective of the second stance, the bare gesture—a physical/virtual event analogous to Jennings's bodily movement—is only one among several elements whose mutual influence facilitates knowledge of right action.

2. MORALS OF THE STORY

It is appropriate at this point to draw out some of the more important results of the foregoing study. We hope that the book as a whole is a demonstration of our most general thesis that viewing ritual activity through the lens of aesthetic theory can be revelatory.

a. Art's Contribution to Ritual. Art is not a decorative addition to ritual; in fact, it is neither a decoration nor an addition. First, the arts are necessary for ritual, in the sense that the multi-leveled languages of the arts are most fit for the multi-leveled integrative functions of ritual practice.³ Second, art is integral to ritual in the sense that the integrative and noetic powers of ritual are directly generated by the functioning of artistic images in the ritual.

b. Ritual's Contribution to Religion. Just as art is not a decorative addition to ritual, ritual is not a decorative addition to religious belief and practice. There is a temptation to view ritual as theology's handmaiden—to suppose, for example, that ritual drama adds emotive *force* to a theological *content*.⁴ We have

3. See chap. 5 above.
4. Historically, there is a family of views reinforcing the notion that ritual is a visual/dramatic, expressive addition to theological ideas: though ritual's power is artistic, its content is nevertheless propositional. (1) Christian cathedral art of the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance was viewed by both Church and artist as didactic in purpose, reminding the parishioner of the Biblical tales and adding the force of art to the moral message. (2) Expressionist art theory in the 19th and 20th centuries (e.g., that of Tolstoy and Langer) holds that the languages of

shown, in contrast, that what the arts contribute to ritual—virtual space and metaphor-like images—is *internal* to the noetic function of ritual, not a mere emotive addition to a knowledge borrowed from sources outside ritual. Ritual images allow an oscillation between the meaningful and the meaninglessness which enables and guides noetic exploration.

c. Invariance. It is possible for invariant ritual practice to be an effective means for generating new knowledge. When this happens, ritual repetition is a central feature of these means; from the perspective of the second stance, knowledge is gained because of repetition, not in spite of it.⁵

Our concern is to expose the transformative potential of even the most structured and repetitive ritual practice. This emphasis can be put in context by borrowing a distinction made by Tom Driver, who delineates three basic functions of traditional ritual practice: "making order, preserving order, fostering community, and effecting transformation" (1991:71). Driver further distinguishes priestly (institutional) rituals from more ancient and fluid shamanistic rituals, claiming that for the former the control function is paramount whereas transformation takes precedence in shamanism. Though our discussion of integrative contexts is relevant to order and community (see chapter 5), we have concentrated on transformation, believing that it is primarily this function which accounts for the perception on the part of the practitioner that the ritual life is profoundly rewarding.

d. The Two Stances: Cooperation and Confrontation. The first stance, derived from Jennings, does not seem to account for Dastur Kertész's commitment to invariance, and it gives only a partial account of the role of repetition, i.e., mere

the arts are particularly fit for the expression of feeling. (3) Emotivist ethical theory distinguishes the emotive force of evaluative sentences from their propositional content. "It is good that you kept your promise" has as content that you kept your promise, and added to that content is commendatory force, something like applause. It is a short step to the claim that ritual adds the force of the beautiful and sublime to an ethical/religious content.
5. See remarks about the spiral form of ritual practice, pp. 114f. above. If one says of ritual (from within the second stance) that it has a noetic function, the pronoun must refer to a *sequence* of performances, for knowledge could not be generated from a single exposure to the ritual. Only repetition, for example, can mirror the unchanging source of creation.

pedagogy. Cognizant of Kowal's position, we have developed a contrary stance which is a point-by-point contradiction of Jennings's.⁶

Now, however, having separated the two stances, there is the opportunity to notice ways in which they may interact. (1) One and then the other of the two stances may be appropriate at different historical stages of a ritual tradition. The originative period may be a time of experimentation and variation which contrasts with a stable period perhaps mirroring a theology of the unchanging sacred. (2) Contemporaneous practitioners may approach between orthodox practitioners and reformists will have debates between orthodox practitioners and reformists will have this form.⁷ (3) A stable, invariant period of a ritual's life may be viewed from both stances at once, so to speak, as providing both pedagogy and new knowledge.

The last point raises a set of interesting methodological questions. How can one identify a given ritual practice as involving ritual masterpieces, and more generally, how can one decide which of the two models (stances) to employ in analyzing a particular ritual or ritual tradition? Our concept of masterpiece has both emic and etic dimensions. On the one hand, a ritual is a masterpiece if it is treated as such by the community and the practitioners—if, for example, they view themselves as having a duty to preserve it unchanged. On the other hand, not every habitually repeated action is a masterpiece; the ceremony must be intricate and multi-leveled enough to repay the kind of analysis the present study illustrates.

The broader issue of which model to employ is difficult, but in part it depends upon what questions govern the study. If one wonders why a particular ritual practice exhibits the changes it does, Jennings's analysis provides a fruitful model, new in its ap-

6. It should be noted that both stances are complicated, differing from one another along more than one dimension. Briefly, they contrast not only in terms of variation/invariance, but according to whether we view ritual as essentially a matter of body knowledge or as a complex of art forms and their components. Stance one, of course, plausibly connects variation with body knowledge, and similarly, stance two brings together invariance and the interplay of art forms. Thus, two other stances can be readily imagined; they would derive from the first two by linking invariance with body knowledge and variation with the aesthetic complexity we attributed to the second stance.

7. See Boyd and Williams 1991.

proach. Instead of tracing changes exclusively to external social/political pressures, for example, he asks what new knowledge gained "by and through the body" is reflected in the observed changes.⁸ We, in contrast, begin with questions about the role of a relatively fixed practice in the lives of Zoroastrian ritual priests.

e. Virtual Space, Potentiation, and Liminality. Drawing on the work of Arnold van Gennep (1960), Victor Turner (1969) developed the notion of ritual liminality—the interim, fluid phase in a ritual of transition which facilitates a change of social status in those partaking in the ceremony.⁹ To the extent that the present study touches on liminality, it is in terms of virtual space and the opposing and potentiating powers of metaphor. Virtual space is productive of "sacred" space which mediates between the known and the unknown or the interpreted and the uninterpreted, and the metaphorical powers are conducive to unraveling accepted meanings and generating new meanings. But in contrast to Turner's liminal stage, our "liminalities" are the regular accompaniments of the practitioner's ongoing process of maturation, and we have investigated the micro-structures within the repeated ritual which interact to produce the moment-by-moment tensions, oscillations, and resolutions—the interplay between structure (conveying) and freedom (potentiating)—which make up that process.¹⁰

8. There are extensive data, for example, on the rapid changes evident in the early decades of this century in Native American peyote ceremonies. Viewing these changes as evidence of a search for fitting action should yield a new and promising approach to their analysis. See Wiedman and Greene 1988 for a short resume of the development of these rituals between 1890 and 1910. Their essay and earlier articles in the same journal could be taken as evidence that there was not only a search for fitting *action*, but also a search for fitting utensils, costumes, physical arrangements, and iconic symbols.

9. E.g., in a coming-of-age ceremony, the one who is a child in the pre-liminal stage becomes a man or a woman in the post-liminal stage by passing through a liminal phase in which the original status is abandoned. This cocoon-like interim process allows a dismanding of the old habits, rights, and duties and the construction of the new.

10. Turner tended to emphasize the symbolic and dramaturgical aspects of rituals and their social functions, e.g., facilitating changes in status. In contrast, we have moved away from emphasis on symbols toward virtual and physical spaces; (2) we have emphasized the many different art forms involved in ritual and their interactions, and (3) our concentration has been on the religious/ethical knowledge gained by the practitioner via repeated ritual practice.

f. Search for a Perspicuous Meta-language. We have asked what interpretive categories are appropriate to two different kinds of performance, ritualistic and artistic. We have not employed the existing meta-languages of ritual studies/anthropology or art criticism. Rather, we have begun to develop a new meta-language, an overarching set of concepts, that is central to both ritual and art. In effect, the notions of horizon, of complex masterpiece, of commitment to invariance, of physical, virtual, and meaning spaces, and of the two poles and the five powers of metaphor provide the overarching meta-language which enables us to bring together in one discussion both art and ritual.¹¹

g. Analysis and Synthesis. Put succinctly, the three spaces and ritual's three characteristics (within the second stance) are *internally connected*, the poles of metaphor are contrary but *complementary*, and the five powers *cooperate* to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge. These integrative relations are indispensable to the explanation of ritual's noetic function and integrative power. Further, it is in terms of these intimate connections among the various elements of our analysis that answers can be provided to questions posed at the outset of this study. In chapter one, several dichotomies were presented in interrogative form. Is ritual an instrument or an autonomous expression? Are rituals maps or parts of the territory? Is ritual emotive or discursive? Does it provide new knowledge or old knowledge in a different form? Is it meaningless (formal, grammatical) or meaningful (interpreted, semantical)?

11. Greenberg, in her recent book on science and literature, claims that she had to develop a new meta-language in order to discuss with one overarching set of concepts the texts of Franz Kafka and of the physicist Max Planck (1990:16). She employed concepts, such as symmetry, that are central to the meta-language appropriate to both literature and science. We are looking at two different kinds of performance rather than two kinds of text, but our method is similar. It may appear that we have merely taken categories from the arts (e.g., virtual space and metaphor) and applied them to ritual, but the situation is not so simple. (1) Of the three spaces, Langer pays attention only to virtual space and emotively bare ritual gestures, uninterpreted mantric sound, etc. (i.e., physical spaces), and by the complex field of meaning appropriate to religious ritual (i.e., a complex meaning space). (2) As we have already seen, the five powers of metaphor have a double origin in ritual (the three characteristics discussed in chap. 6) and art (Bly/Davidson on metaphor). Hence, our three spaces and five powers provide an overarching meta-language enabling us to bring together in one discussion both art and ritual.

B. REMARKS ON METHOD

1. PARAMETERS OF THE PRESENT STUDY

The answers, with regard to the choices presented by these questions have all been "yes." To take but one example, Fritz Staal claims that rituals are meaningless and that they must be studied as events, not as signs (1979:3). In contrast, Victor Turner insists that ritual liminality is established by means of the symbolic structure of ritual performance (1969:94-96). From the perspective of this study, such debates are viewed in terms of the harmonization and conflict of physical and meaning spaces via the mediation of virtual space. We expect that rituals range from those in which physical and virtual aspects dominate to those dominated by theological interpretation. Neither of the one-dimensional analyses proposed by Staal and Turner is adequate by itself.¹²

Since we have brought philosophical (aesthetic) insights to bear on the study of ritual, making claims about what ritual is and what it does, our analysis may appear to be more comprehensive than is actually intended.

a. Philosophical Context. Note first that we have not begun with a systematic metaphysics (e.g., Aristotle's), deriving our aesthetics from it and then applying those results to the analysis of ritual. Our study is not *systematic* in that traditional sense. Further, we have made no attempt to prove that the theories of Langer, Davidson, or Bly are *true*. Rather, we have borrowed freely from these theories and made our own use of them. In this sense, our approach is pluralistic rather than systematic, and, confronted with other rituals, we might employ different theories and categories as well as extend the present results and methods of analysis.

Our use of what amounts to different methods and kinds of data, ranging from fieldwork to philosophical analysis and from empirical observations to Roquentin's fictional diary, is prompted

12. With respect to Zoroastrian ritual, Dastur Koral acknowledges the importance of both ritual gesture and its theological interpretations (see above, p. 55).

by our belief that in ritual studies, fundamental questions of method remain open.¹³

b. The Realm of Ritual. Indeed, one might suspect that, instead of essential characteristics of rituals, there are resemblances among members of a highly diverse family. We have looked at one member of that family: traditional, highly interpreted, religious rituals. Within that family, we have studied only Zoroastrian ritual practice, leaving open the question of how far the analysis could be extended. Further, in part two, the discussion is limited to *stances* toward ritual rather than to the general characteristics of the set of rituals under investigation.

c. Other Aspects of Ritual Yet To Be Explored. Since our focus is on ritual's aesthetic dimension, the transcendental reference in Zoroastrian rites—to Ahura Mazda, the *fravashis*, and the Bountiful Immortals—has not been the object of our study. Our characterization of virtual and metaphorical powers and their contributions to the creation of "sacred" space and rituals' integrative and noetic functions can be stated in ways independent of such religious/ontological issues. Nevertheless, ontological and aesthetic concerns have intersected at certain places in our study, and one could pursue other such areas of convergence. We have, for example, mentioned the aesthetic conditions for the spiritual efficacy of performative utterances in

13. For example: in his justly famous *The Golden Bough* (1890), Sir James Frazer accounted for the human effigies in certain contemporary fire festivals by tracing the origins of these festivals to ancient rites involving actual human sacrifice. Wittgenstein (1967) objected to Frazer's explanatory scheme, not on the grounds that his claims about origins were false, but that they were irrelevant to what really needs explaining. In his astute analysis of the philosopher's objections, Cioffi says that Wittgenstein means that many of the fire-festivals are intelligible as they stand, that in their details, or in the demarcation of their participants, they directly manifest their "inner character," their relation to the idea of the sacrificial burning of a man. "They strike us as . . . dramatizations of this idea independently of any empirical evidence that they originated in such an event. (1981:213)

Wittgenstein seems to be calling for something like an aesthetic analysis of the festivals to reveal their inner character or perhaps an analysis of the contemporary audience and its beliefs about human nature in order to account for our responses to the rites. The lesson we take away from his discussion is that we can be mistaken about what needs explaining and thus mistaken in our methods and in what we take to be relevant data.

the Yasna and have emphasized the key moment—both religious and aesthetic—in the flower exchange when the flowers are consecrated.

As for the aesthetic approach itself, interactions among aesthetic features of a ritual are so numerous that our study had to be limited, for example, to the flower exchange and its gestural component. In subsequent research, we intend to broaden the study to other important features such as the timing and rhythm of the performance, the placement of the implements, the priests' position and movement, and the involvement of their senses of taste and smell.¹⁴

Lastly, though repetition has important psychological effects, some of which are related to knowledge,¹⁵ we have not extended our speculations to the realm of the unconscious.¹⁶ Sartre's fictional diary with its self-conscious philosophical analyses of the record's impact and our analyses of Zoroastrian rituals are rational reconstructions of processes that guide and change the practitioner on both conscious and unconscious levels.¹⁷

2. CONFIRMATION

We have searched for and constructed a considerable, but not total, area of overlap between Dastur Kotwal's views and our own. We are intent neither on defending nor on correcting the

14. Dr. Philip Turetzky has pointed out to us the important role of both rhythm and "pulse" in language, music, and ritual activity. Pulse has to do with the small, improvised departures from mathematically precise rhythms. See also Bly 1982.

15. For example, a traumatized child engaged in play therapy with dolls may create a "play" whose plot remains constant through many repetitions. Subsequent broad changes in the child's behavior indicate that the repetition is affecting portions of the psyche other than the conscious, for the child's conscious pronouncements about the trauma often remain unaltered. Such spontaneous creations of repetitive "artworks" as a mode of self-healing are obviously related to ritual practice, though the latter tends to be collective/archetypal, reflecting the human condition rather than personal trauma.

16. Our theory is extended neither to the personal unconscious (healing therapy) nor to the collective (mythic archetypes). However, see above, p. 77 and n. 26, for Freud's concerns about repetition.

17. We have traced the aesthetic structures that can affect the practitioner on many levels rather than speculating about those levels and unconscious mechanisms. However, if it is true that repetition has potentially profound unconscious effects, this affords one more reason, in addition to those cited in the previous chapter, for taking repetition to be central.

practitioner's view of his tradition. We hope that two intertwined stories have emerged from the investigation: one about the ritual structure and the priest's commitment to, and vision of, the ritual practice, and the other about the ritual as artwork and the powers of art.

As noted, our theory has its origins in the literatures of philosophy of art (e.g., Langer) and ritual studies (notably, Jennings), and in the encounter with a Zoroastrian ritual priest. For confirmation of this theory, we have relied not only on its explanatory power and internal coherence, but also on extensive field notes. The latter had been previously gathered for purposes of documenting Zoroastrian ritual and were thus largely independent of our views. We subsequently presented our results to Dastur Kotwal for his critical responses.¹⁸

C. THE RITUAL ACT AND THE THEORY OF THE ACT

Students of ritual know how difficult it is to see ritual performances with relatively unbiased eyes. Our collaborative study of the Yasna and the Afrinagan began with repeated viewings of videotaped performances. We found ourselves attending over and over to such gestures as those of the flower exchange. There were two results: we became more convinced that aesthetic analysis was appropriate, and we were struck by the inevitable distance which exists between such gestures and theoretical analyses of them. The following remarks concern that distance.

1. SHIFTING FROM ACT TO THEORY

Not unexpectedly, a view of ritual through the lens of aesthetics has its distortions. The original ceremony must be subjected to a number of changes in perspective, a series of displacements or "shifts." The first is the necessary shift from the ritual as enacted by the priests to the ritual as observed by the outsider or, even more distantly, as observed secondhand by means of film or description. Next the ritual is considered as a performative artwork. The artwork, in turn, is treated as a series of visual/dramatic images which are then taken to be akin to poetic images or metaphors. Finally, we provide propositional de-

18. His responses were generally favorable, and varied from enthusiastic approval of some of our key concepts, such as masterpiece and companionable form, to patient endurance of some of our philosophical ruminations.

scriptions of the significance of these poetic images with the implicit claim, of course, that such descriptions illuminate the original ritual enactment.

The reader will judge the extent to which such moves provide insight and knowledge. Here we wish to acknowledge that so many shifts entail a rather obvious risk: at each juncture something may be lost or distorted, or arbitrary elements may be introduced. If our account is enlightening, it serves its function somewhat in the way a caricature does: not in spite of its distortions but because of them.¹⁹

2. THE GENERAL LIMITS OF THEORY

In addition to any concerns about our particular approach, one can also question other more general aspects of the rhetorical enterprise. When Michael Polanyi laments, for example, that "unbridled lucidity can destroy our understanding of complex matters," that it can "efface" meaning known on the tacit level, and that it can never bring to the fore such original meaning, he is speaking of dangers inherent in the very nature of theory, risks which cannot be escaped though they can escape notice (1966:18).²⁰ It might be claimed that his remarks are particularly appropriate in the area of ritual studies, for the ritual gesture is known by doing, not by means of the intermediary of language. In addition, what one comes to know via ritual performance may also in part be "tacit knowledge" which can be only incompletely understood by means of propositional explanations.

There are yet more fundamental concerns. One cannot at this late hour employ language to theorize, idealize, simulate,

19. See Williams 1982:9, 11: "when we speak of distortion, particularly that involved in abstraction, caricature, or metaphor, we must be careful. For these modes of description do not work in spite of distortion: they work because of it. They belong to the class of those things which are false but illuminating or even illuminating because false. Lichtheim's 'misconstruings' of other works (to use his word) not only result in artworks (his own), but are produced in the service of revelation."
20. More precisely, Polanyi is claiming that propositions, no matter how carefully framed, can never fully capture those aspects of our experience about which we can have *tacit knowledge*. One has tacit knowledge, for example, of how to carry out a ritual gesture. Such gestures, in turn, may facilitate one's coming to know in ways which can also only be incompletely understood via propositional explanation.

one's description of ritual to descriptions of artworks leaves the former incompletely characterized. For example, some rituals are claimed to be salvific, whereas artworks are not; and it is a sign of loss of faith if a ritual practitioner comes to see the ceremony as (only) aesthetically interesting. This brings us to a warning: none of the shifts described above are to be understood reductionistically. We want to claim that it is helpful to view rituals as artworks but not that rituals are *merely* artworks—and similarly for the other shifts mentioned. It would be gratuitous after so many sophisticated studies of ritual again to warn against reductionism, if it weren't for the fact that it is so easy to escape one kind of reductionism by falling immediately into another.

4. ATTENDING TO THE GESTURE

Perhaps our response to the more fundamental concerns about the inevitable distortions introduced by theoretical description can be made more apparent by our posing a different question. What other approaches might be undertaken that are essentially different from our own and other theorists' methods? The traditional suggestion is that one must partake in ritual to understand ritual. This amounts to the requirement that all thought and talk about ritual be embedded in committed ritual practice.²³ Such a method may well be the best way, but it eliminates whatever insight can be provided by the uncommitted observer. In any event, it is not our way.

In the preface to this book, we spoke of the original stimulus for our speculation about ritual: the difficulty of *seeing* the reality of the ritual fire. Subsequently, while viewing videotapes of Zoroastrian rituals, we were struck by the *distance* between our theoretical analyses and the gestures themselves. In this respect, we, Jennings, and other students of ritual share a basic problem: how do we call attention to and do justice to the physical/experiential aspect of ritual while speaking of knowledge, analogy, interpretation, meaning—in short, by theorizing? The actual phenomenon tends to retreat behind the concepts. The reader

23. This requirement can be given both a religious and a political meaning: e.g., the Buddhist's insistence on surrounding thinking with meditation and ritual practice, and the Marxist's notion of praxis.

or formalize without bearing in mind recent post-modernist and deconstructionist warnings about how language makes dead that which it seeks to animate.²¹ If in spite of those well-argued warnings, we have herein persisted in the modernist, constructivist activities of description, analysis, and rational reconstruction, it is in the double faith that (1) such methods still retain some power to reveal, provided that (2) they are undertaken with constant reference to their limits. We are left, then, in the difficult position of trying by means of abstract language to reveal something of the power and significance of the unadorned, non-referring ritual gesture, which not only escapes complete description but is easily lost sight of, covered over with words.²²

3. INTERPRETATION WITHOUT REDUCTIONISM

In addition to the limitations of theory in general, a more specific danger involved in the interpretation of ritual is reductionism. With respect to the interpretive shifts described above—the moves from enacted ritual to ritual observed to ritual artwork and on to image, poetic metaphor, and interpretation—it is important to remind ourselves and the reader that every gain in sharpness of focus is balanced by a loss or reduction. To move backward through the list of shifts: the poetic image has a significance and a signification in excess of any propositional rendition of its meaning; the visual/gestural image exceeds the metaphor; the ritual artwork is more than a set of visual images, and the aesthetic is but one dimension of ritual activity.

To put our point differently: *rituals are artworks as persons are physical objects*. According to many theories of the person, most anything that can be meaningfully said about material objects can also be said about persons; and for the range of rituals we are considering, most anything that can be said about artworks can be said about ritual performances. But persons and rituals are more than objects and artworks, respectively. So confining

21. See Shavito 1990:10: "Every process of formalization or idealization is founded upon the death of its object. . . . [The] aesthetic state of purposiveness without purpose (e.g., Kant), eliminates the proximity of the object on the one hand, and the passion of the subject on the other. Aesthetics is predicated upon death precisely to the extent that it posits the free disinterested delight of a fixed and centered subject regarding the unity of a static object. . . ."

22. These remarks extend as well, of course, to sound, visual image, dance, etc.

loses the *power* of the image while learning a great deal, propositionally, about the image.

In closing, perhaps it is fitting for us to try to recapture a sense of ritual action-*sans-theory*. An approach very different from our own would be to abandon the way of words as a means of revelatory description in favor of some entirely other medium such as imitative reenactment or some nonstandard kind of cinematic treatment (traditional documentary film would not do).²⁴ This would still be just another form of description from an external point of view, but imagining it is a way of seeing more clearly the nature of our own approach, which relies on concept and proposition.

We can hint at such an alternative by turning to Gilles Deleuze's description of a certain kind of recent cinema which seeks to reveal gesture and the presence of the body more directly. Rather than being a cinema which displays purposeful action and thus highlights intention, thought, and affect (the mind seeking to impose its will on world and body), this new cinema focuses on the "unthought life" of the body. Deleuze says:

"Give me a body then": this is the formula of philosophical reversal. The body is no longer the obstacle that separates thought from itself, that which it has to overcome to reach thinking. It is on the contrary that which it plunges into or must plunge into, in order to reach the unthought, that is life. Not that the body thinks, but, obstinate and stubborn, it forces us to think, and forces us to think what is concealed from thought, life. Life [in this new cinema] will no longer be made to appear before the categories of thought; thought will be thrown into the categories of life. The categories of life are precisely the attitudes of the body, its postures. . . . It is through the body (and no longer through the intermediary of the body) that [this] cinema forms its alliance with the spirit, with thought. . . . (1989:189)

Deleuze goes on to give examples of key films of this type and of the directors who have set up their cameras in front of people engaged in ordinary, un-acted activities, or who have continued to film the actors after a scene has actually ended, or who have

24. On documentary film, see Deleuze 1989:147-55. Traditional documentation for all its greatness still relies on voice-over text and does not focus imaginatively on the body, posture, and gesture in the manner of the new cinema of the body.

caught people revealing the ceremonial aspects of their mundane behavior.²⁵ In such films, "characters" are constituted gesture by gesture and word by word, as the film proceeds; they construct themselves, the shooting acting on them like a revelation, each advancement of the film allowing them a new development in their behavior, their own duration very precisely coinciding with that of the film" (1989:193).²⁶

It is striking that this cinema of the body and its postures took over half a century to develop and that only a handful of contemporary master filmmakers have taken this path. Perhaps given these hints, we can partially imagine an alternative method of revealing ritual gesture, one that is the result of the cinema of the body taking as its subject particular ceremonies. Such a method would lie at an opposite extreme from our own and others' *theories* of ritual.²⁷ But for us, the point to be made is this: the uninterpreted ritual actions which would be the subject of such a film, which such a cinema might bring to the fore and force upon our attention, are the very events which are the subject of our own theoretical remarks. We ask the reader to remember this in order not to lose sight of the gesture in a blizzard of words.

We have theorized in order to see more clearly and appreciate more profoundly, but none of this effort replaces the ritual act and what it makes manifest: the difference between event and word, between life and reflection.

25. For example, Warhol, Antonioni, and Casavettes.
26. The importance of these examples for the present study is not to establish firm criteria for the "new cinema" but to suggest the subtlety of the quest for a cinematic language appropriate to the revelation of the body and its postures.
27. When Deleuze praises the cinema of the body and exclaims, "Give me a body then," it might be thought that he is making a point similar to Jennings' claim that ritual essentially involves body knowledge. But, of course, Deleuze is not analyzing the noetic function of ritual. The discussion here is not about the role of movement in ritual, but rather about different kinds of descriptive systems—cinematic and propositional/analytical—for illuminating ritual gesture.

RITUAL DESCRIPTION

Appendixes:

THE YASNA: A ZOROASTRIAN HIGH LITURGY

A. OVERVIEW

The Yasna ("worship") service is the most frequently performed liturgy in a Zoroastrian fire temple.¹ It normally requires two and one-half hours and is celebrated before noon in a consecrated area of the fire temple (see Fig. 2). The liturgy is solemnized by two priests and is preceded by a service (the *paragna*) in which one of the priests assembles and consecrates the ritual materials necessary for the Yasna.²

Each liturgical performance is sponsored either by members of the laity or by the priesthood. Zoroastrian laity sometimes witness the liturgy, but it is essentially a priestly act of worship on behalf of the whole community.³ The liturgy is celebrated to please the exalted Lord of Wisdom, Ahura Mazda, and all spirit beings of his good creation. They are invited to be present at the liturgical celebration and are asked to receive the offerings and bestow their bountiful blessings.

The Yasna text, recited by memory, is divided into seventy-two chapters. Within those chapters are the Gathas of Zarathushtra (chapters 28-34, 43-51, and 53), which are given special reverence. The entire Avestan text, however, is considered manthric by orthodox Zoroastrians. *Manthra*, or sacred speech, infuses the entire consecrated area with holiness and

1. Since a detailed description of the Yasna liturgy is available (see Koral and Boyd 1991), the present description is intended only to highlight the general features of the ritual and offer a summary of its narrative sequence. (For references to other descriptions of varying detail, see Koral and Boyd 1991:61.)

2. See Koral and Boyd 1991:61-85, and 1977:18-52.

3. For a discussion of worship in a Zoroastrian fire temple, see Boyd and Koral 1984:293-318. The priesthood is hereditary through the male line, and qualified priests, as part of their training, have undergone extensive study of the ancient scriptural languages of Avestan and Pahlavi, as well as Iranian history, theology, and ethics. They have also committed to memory the entire Avestan Yasna and know in detail all the ritual actions which accompany its recitation.

power, which in turn benefit both the physical (*getig*) and spiritual (*menog*) worlds.

B. REQUISITES FOR THE CEREMONY

The ritual area is oriented toward the south and contains three low, stone tables. On the southernmost table is the fire, which is of major importance to the ritual, and is kept alive throughout the ceremony by the assistant priest. He feeds the fire pieces of sandalwood and frankincense taken from a round tray near the fire. At the other end of the ritual area is a stone platform on which the chief priest sits or stands during the liturgy. In front of the platform is the ritual table set with purified utensils.

On the east side of the ritual table are two crescent-shaped metal stands, their form suggesting the crescent moon or the horns of a bull. Laid across the top of the stands is a bundle of twenty-one wires called *barsom*, which are held together by a date-palm leaf woven into a cord. The date-palm is kept freshly moistened throughout the ceremony, and the gesture of moistening the *barsom* marks the start of the recitation of a new chapter of the Yasna text.

Next to the stands is a metal saucer of fresh goat's milk, which is mixed with other ingredients to make a consecrated drink called *hom*. Other utensils on the ritual table are a mortar in which twigs are crushed to make the *hom* drink, a shallow bowl (next to the mortar) containing three *hom* twigs and a pomegranate twig, and three metal cups—one containing a *parahom* drink consecrated in the prefatory service; another, the libation water; and the third, the strands of a bull's hair tied to a ring. The bowl containing unleavened wheat bread and a cube of clarified butter, placed on the table early in the ceremony, is also shown in Fig. 2.

Beside the ritual table is a large metal basin of water in which a pestle and strainer are submerged. The strainer is used as a sieve for filtering the consecrated *hom* drink. A vase-like metal container next to the basin is used throughout the liturgy for pouring water to cleanse and purify the priests' hands.

C. PREPARATION

The two priests must ritually cleanse themselves prior to any service, whether an inner temple liturgy like the Yasna or an outer

ceremony like the Afrinagan. They wash their hands, faces, and feet, and unite and re-tie the sacred cords around their waists (*padayab-kusti*) while reciting established prayers appropriate for the hour and the day. Both priests wear white garments: white turbans, white veils covering their mouths and noses. The veil prevents any saliva from touching the ritual objects.

Before the chief priest enters the ritual area to join his assistant, who has just completed the prefatory (*paragird*) service, he proclaims: "righteousness is good" (*ashem vohu* 1; hereafter abbreviated *av* 1, the Arabic numeral designating the number of utterances). Upon entering the consecrated area, he takes some sandalwood and frankincense from the round tray and offers it to the fire on a ladle while reciting the great Ahunawar *manthra* eight times (designated by its first three words: *yatha ahuvairyō* 8; hereafter abbreviated *yau* 8). Dastur Kotwal's rendering of this *manthra* is:

As Ahura Mazda is the Sovereign Lord, so is Zoroaster the spiritual lord due to his righteousness. The gifts of the Good Mind are for those who work for Mazda, the Lord of Wisdom. He who nourishes the poor ascribes sovereignty to Ahura Mazda.⁴

This invocation is soon followed by an antiphonal recitation between the two priests, called an "exchange of *hōy* [utterance]."⁵ The chief priest's role as representative of the Lord of Wisdom is affirmed in this exchange, as is the creative and sustaining purpose of the Yasna liturgy. The exchange begins with the chief priest's addressing Ahura Mazda as the Priest of all creation and asking the Lord of Wisdom to reveal the twenty-one words of the Ahunawar, the most efficacious *manthra* of the

4. There is no agreement on the exact translation of the Ahunawar *manthra*. See also Boyce's rendering of Insler's translation: "As the Master, so is the Judge to be chosen in accord with truth. Establish the power of acts arising from a life lived with good purpose, for Mazda and for the lord whom they made pastor of the poor" (1984:56). Eight Ahunawar *manthras* is the appropriate number for a Yasna solemnized in honor of all holy guardian spirits of the righteous (Ardadra-wash), which is our present example. The number of *yau* varies with the name of the spirit being(s) in whose honor the Yasna is performed. For example, the current practice is to say *yau* 10 for the Yasna of Ahura Mazda and *yau* 5 for Stosh. For a further discussion, see Kotwal and Boyd 1991:86, n. 70.

5. For a discussion of the "exchange of *hōy*," see Boyce and Kotwal 1971:59-60.

the spirit being Srosh, who was the first to worship the Bountiful Immortals with *barsom* and who dwells in the midst of the created order as Ahura Mazda's protective and inspirational presence in both the *gētīg* and *menōg* realms.

The drinking of the *parahom* mixture, which follows upon a libation to the spirit being Hom (Y. 9-11), induces spiritual exhaltation and is associated in the dedicatory recitation with Zarathushtra (Y. 3-8), the priest and prophet of the revelation from Ahura Mazda to humankind. The chief priest's ingesting of the sacred bread and drink, therefore, is a physical act of appropriating the invigorating power of Hom, the protective and inspirational presence of Srosh, and the revelatory insights provided by the prophet Zarathushtra.

A profession of faith in these revealed insights (Y. 12-13) follows. The chief priest praises the practice of good thoughts, words, and deeds and denounces all that is negative and contrary to such righteousness. Both priests commit their lives to Ahura Mazda even if it requires sacrifice of their bodies for the sake of their souls.

The theological context of this profession of faith is cosmic, both in space and in time, for the ritual area itself is a microcosm of the whole of reality. Once consecrated, each ritual item exemplifies the presence of its corresponding Bountiful Immortal. The ritual precinct of purified stone manifests the spirit of Devotion. The consecrated water and plants and wheat bread become the actualized presence of Health and Life. The hairs from a living white bull are the material presence of the holy power of Good Mind. The consecrated fire is the physical embodiment of the principle of Righteousness, and the metal implements, like the crystal sky which was conceived as metallic by Zarathushtra, exemplify the power of Dominion. Thus the priests are committed to a battle of universal proportions in order to conquer evil even in the face of their own personal destruction.

Having enacted their commitment by professing their faith, and having invoked the *menōg* powers, the priests libate the date-palm cord tied around the *barsom* wires with a mixture of consecrated water and goats' milk (Y. 14-18). The libation exemplifies the archetypal principles of Health (water) and the Good Mind (milk) and conveys these sustaining powers to the date-palm cord. A hymn to the Lords of all the *mainthras*

Zoroastrians. The assistant priest also asks that the Ahunawar be proclaimed. The chief priest as representative of Ahura Mazda then affirms that Zarathushtra, the holy and wise spiritual guide, proclaimed the Ahunawar through righteousness.⁶

After this exchange of *bag*, a number of ritual actions take place, including the purification of the firstand and the placement of the unleavened piece of bread (with its cube of clarified butter) in a saucer on the ritual table. Both priests recite in an undertone a Pazand dedication (*āibachā*) to the spirit being in whose honor the Yasna is being performed. It expresses the hope that this ceremony will be completed with success, and names the person, living or dead, in whose remembrance the service is being celebrated.

Pazand recitations are generally said in an undertone (*bisā*) when their placement comes between Avestan *mainthra*. In this way, the full-voiced (*gushada*) manthric recitations are essentially uninterrupted, and a continuity of sacred speech maintained. The holy power of manthric speech, in fact, is not only sustained throughout the ceremony, but also frames or encircles the liturgy, both at the beginning and at the end.⁷

D. THE YASNA PROPER

The memorized recitation of seventy-two chapters of the Avestan Yasna begins with an invitation to Ahura Mazda, the Bountiful Immortals, and all other good spirit beings (Yasna 1). This is followed by a libation to *barsom* (Y. 2), the bundle of metal wires which is an emblem of the whole liturgy; with it, the chief priest establishes a connecting link between this *gētīg* world and the *menōg* realm.

The major ritual actions in the early portion of the Yasna are the tasting of the sacred bread (Y. 8) and the drinking of the *parahom* (Y. 11), a mixture of consecrated water with the essence of crushed *hom* and pomegranate twigs prepared in the preliminary service. The tasting of the sacred bread is done in honor of

6. The Ahunawar *mainthra* epitomizes the whole Zoroastrian revelation. The Zoroastrian scriptures were organized into twenty-one *mask*s, or collections of writings, to conform with the twenty-one words of the Ahunawar prayer, and recitation of this *mainthra* is equivalent to reciting the entire canon.
7. See the description of the Afrinagan of Ardabir, below, pp. 169-70 and n. 5, for further explanation.

follows (Y. 19-21), thus affirming in explicit sequence the power of both the ritual deed and the spoken word.⁸

The major ritual actions in the next portion of the liturgy center in the pounding and consecration of the *hóm* (Y. 22-27), a sacramental drink that will contain all the ingredients of *parahom* plus milk, a product of the animal kingdom which exemplifies the principle of the Good Mind. In recitation and gesture, the celebrant approaches Ahura Mazda and his spiritual creation with praise of the spirit being Hom and with all the exemplary items of the ritual offering: milk, the date-palm cord, water, the iron mortar, the Gathas, sandalwood and frankincense, and the ritual fire.

Striking the mortar with the pestle and reciting the Ahunawar *manthra*, the chief priest pounds the twigs. In so doing, he dramatically joins the cosmic battle between the forces of good and evil, each blow of the pestle smiting the invoked presence of Angra Mainyu (the evil one), the demon of wrath, and all gigantic, wicked, and lustful demons. The fact that we humans possess the Ahunawar is again celebrated (the Ahunavaiti Gatha; Y. 28-34), and the mantric power of this revelation is infused into the mixture as the priest pounds the *hóm* twigs three more times, releasing their life-giving essence.

The priests then praise the bountiful and sovereign Lord, the teacher and hearer of *manthra*, and the earth, water, sky and winds, fish and animals, together with the exalted spirit being Hom, who prevents disease and promotes the world (Y. 35-42). A hymn of happiness follows (the Ushavaiti Gatha; Y. 43-46), a Gathic hymn extolling the Lord of Wisdom and the happiness of the spiritual life He provides us. The prosperity and immortality

8. The "lords" among the *manthras* are three: the Ahunawar, the Ashem Vohu, and the Yenghe Hatam. The Ahunawar has already been noted, as has the Ashem Vohu, the *manthra* in praise of righteousness. The Yenghe Hatam is the *manthra* of Zarathushtra, recognizing the law of Wisdom and the praise and worship for Ahura Mazda, the Bountiful Immortals, and all those holy in conduct. A fourth prayer is sometimes added to this list of the "lords" of *manthra*, the Dahman Afrin (Y. 60-61), which is a *manthra* of benediction asking that there may be triumph of obedience, peace, charity, humility, true speech, and righteousness over their opposite forms of wickedness. The Dahman Afrin is also a feature of the Afrinagan ceremony (see below, p. 172, in the Afrinagan description).

of the spiritual life granted through the Bountiful Spirit (the Spenta Mainyu Gatha; Y. 47-50) and the power of the Good Mind is proclaimed, followed by a Gathic hymn of appeal that the right governing power be brought about to sustain the good and happy life in the world (the Vohu-Khshathra Gatha; Y. 51). A prayer for blessings on all good persons and the entire creation (Y. 52) precedes the final Gathic hymn of Best Wishes (the Vahishta Ishiti Gatha; Y. 53), which declares a blessed life to those who live honestly and reiterates the threat of a hellish life for those who prefer evil. It is the true spirit of companionship (Y. 54) among honest persons that brings joy and happiness to men and women.

The five Gathas just recited are celebrated (Y. 55), for they are the source of wisdom and are eminently worthy of study, the very food and clothing of our souls. Two litanies to Stroh follow (Y. 56-57), the first again requesting his presence here in the worship service, as it is through Stroh that Ahura Mazdas inspiration is heard. The second litany praises Stroh as a courageous warrior, the first who worshipped the Bountiful Immortals with *barsom* and the first to chant the five Gathas. The *manthra* of prosperity (Y. 58-59), which is to be uttered before the last judgment at the end of this time of mixture, affirms that it is the righteous who take care that the world prospers. The priest then praises the power of victory, the future savior Soshyant, who will usher in the end-times of the period of mixture; all holy souls and guardian spirits; the *barsom* and libation.

The final section of the Yasna consists of a further binding of the *barsom* with the date-palm cord, praise of fire and water, and the pouring of the consecrated *hóm* offering into a well outside the ritual area. It begins with a recitation of the *manthra* of benediction (Dahman Afrin; Y. 60-61), which proclaims the triumph of obedience, peace, charity, humility, true speech, righteousness, and prosperity over wickedness. The powerful and pervading presence of all *manthras*, it is affirmed, dislodges Angra Mainyu and his evil creation of thieves, heretics, sorcerers, tyrants, and evil-speaking workers.

A litany to fire, the son of Ahura Mazda (Y. 62) and very presence of cosmic order, is followed by a litany to the waters (Y. 62.11-Y. 70), the primordial source of Health. An earnest desire

is expressed that the waters accept the consecrated libation about to be offered to them. This is followed by a litany to the whole creation (Y. 71-72).

Praise of the ancient *manthras* ends with a ritual handshake, during which both priests say (in the Pazand language): "May you be united in strength with all righteous ones." The chief priest then concludes this portion of the liturgy, which takes place in the ritual precinct, by uttering a dedication to the spirit being in whose honor the Yasna is being performed. Leaving the ritual area, he proceeds to the well with his assistant to pour the libation into the well-waters, praising the whole creation that it may be strengthened.

Infusing the consecrated *hom* drink into the well blesses and strengthens the waters and thereby the rest of creation. Thus the purpose of the liturgy is accomplished, for the blessings of the spiritual realm have been received in the consecration of the material realm, and the good creation is strengthened to the pleasure of the exalted Lord of Wisdom. The Yasna concludes, as it began, with the mantric declaration "righteousness is good" (a.u. 1).

THE AFRINAGAN OF ARDAFRAWASH: CEREMONY OF BLESSINGS DEDICATED TO ALL HOLY GUARDIAN SPIRITS

A. OVERVIEW

The Afrinagan or "blessings" ceremony is one of the most commonly performed rituals in the Zoroastrian community and may be celebrated in a home, garden, fire temple, or in the buildings adjoining the towers of silence. It is usually conducted by two Zoroastrian priests, though more may participate; qualified laity are also eligible to perform it. The half-hour ceremony essentially consists of the recitation of three selections from the Avesta over an offering of fragrant flowers, wine, and fruits set before a fire. The ritual can be solemnized in honor of any spirit being (*yazad*) or beings and is celebrated in the name of either a living person or a deceased soul.

From an orthodox Zoroastrian perspective, the purpose of this ritual is to invite spiritual beings (from the *menog* realm) into this world (the *gētīg* realm) and offer them the essence of the consecrated food. The spirit beings derive both pleasure and strength from these offerings. They, in turn, bestow blessings of prosperity and increase to all righteous inhabitants of both the *gētīg* and *menog* realms. Those persons named in the ceremony are especially blessed.¹

B. REQUISITES FOR THE CEREMONY

A characteristic ritual setting is illustrated in Fig. 4. On the white cloth placed over a rug are a variety of silver trays, a fire vase, a ladle and a pair of tongs, an oil lamp, and a vase of water. One tray contains fruits (pomegranate is always used; others

1. For a more general and interpretive description of the Afrinagan ceremony and its relation to other Zoroastrian rituals, see Modi 1922:354-84; Haug 1878: 1978:408-9; and Drower 1956:224-28; see also Westergaard 1852-54:318-24. Major Zoroastrian community events are commemorated by public acts of worship, called *jashnans*, in which an Afrinagan ceremony is performed.

D. PAZAND PREFACE: *Dibācha*

The chief priest begins the "blessings" ceremony dedicated to all holy guardian spirits² by reciting a preface (*dibācha*) in the Pazand language, the opening line of which is: "With good thoughts, words, and deeds—with good thinking, speaking, and doing—may this dedication reach the righteous guardian spirits [*ardāfrawash*]." This recitation also remembers the name of the spirit being (*yazad*) to whom the ceremony is dedicated, the name of the person, living or dead, in whose honor the service is held, and the name(s) of the living person(s) who commissioned the service. In addition, the priest announces the number and the names of the manthric prayers and other dedicatory formulas that will be recited in the ceremony proper.³ Using the tongue, the chief priest puts frankincense on the fire while remembering the name of the departed, recalling the name of Zoroaster, and reciting dedications to the guardian spirits. The assistant priest joins in the recitation of the last phrase ("May it be successful" or "Amen") of the preface as both priests bring their hands together in a ritual salutation.

E. FIRST SELECTION OF AVESTAN RECITATIONS

Before the recitation of a portion of the Avesta that invokes all holy guardian spirits (*ardāfrawash*), both priests recite several *manthras* and dedicatory formulas appropriate for this celebration, including eight invocations of the great Ahunawar *manthra* (*ya u* 8) and three of the prayer in praise of righteousness (*ya u* 3).⁴ Such manthric invocations will also be said at the conclusion

2. Throughout, we will use the example of that Afrinagan ceremony which is dedicated to all guardian spirits.

3. For a full text and translation of the Pazand *dibācha*, see Korwal and Boyd 1991:149–54.

4. The appropriate number of *manthras* and dedicatory formulas for an Afrinagan of Ardafrawash are: eight Ahunawar *manthras* (*ya u* 8), three *ashem* *voht manthras* (*ya u* 3), an invocation of the name of the spirit being presiding over the time of the day, a short dedication to all holy guardian spirits, and an antiphonal Avestan recitation between the chief priest and the assistant priest (exchange of *baŋ*). This is followed by a longer dedicatory formula to all holy guardian spirits. For a fuller description of the dedicatory formulas, see Korwal and Boyd 1991:91, n. 87. For a discussion of the exchange of *baŋ*, see the Yasna description above, p. 161; Korwal and Boyd 1991:106–7; and Boyce and Korwal 1971:59–73.

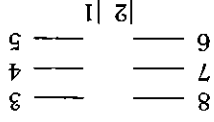
may be dates, papaya, pears, apples, grapes, coconut, or dry fruits such as raisins), flowers (fragrant flowers of the season, such as roses and jasmine are sometimes supplemented with vases of gladiolas and other seasonal flowers), a vase of water, and three small glasses of milk, sharbat (a sweet lime juice), and wine. Another tray holds sandalwood and frankincense. Additional trays containing eggs and cooked sweetmeats, may also be used.

In the present example, two priests conduct the ceremony. During the first portion of the ritual, the priests sit facing each other on opposite sides of the fire vase. At other times in the ceremony, the assistant priest stands. The tray containing the flowers and the liquid offerings is situated in front but slightly to the left of the chief priest and touches the fire vase. The tray containing sandalwood and frankincense is to the assistant priest's side, as are the tongs, ladle, and oil lamp. The assistant priest is in charge of building and maintaining the fire throughout the ceremony.

C. PREPARATION

Prior to the celebration, the two priests ritually cleanse themselves by washing their hands, faces, and feet, and untying and re-tying the sacred cords around their waists (*bad-yab-kusti*) while reciting established prayers appropriate for the time of the day. The ritual is to be celebrated. They wear white organdy robes over their white shirts and pants, priestly turbans, and veils covering their mouths and noses. The chief priest faces east, preferably, or if this is not possible due to limitations of location, south or west. He never faces north.

Before the ceremony begins, the chief priest picks up eight flowers and arranges them in the following way. Two flowers are placed vertically on the cloth directly in front of him. The other six flowers are lined up horizontally in two groups of three with the blossoms facing the center.



of this section of the ritual, as well as at the end of the ceremony itself, thereby encircling each section and the entire ritual with the power of holy manthric speech. Reciting these initial invocations is called "entering the *bay*," and the concluding recitations are termed "leaving the *bay*."

Both priests then recite the first selection of Avestan *manthra*, which is a litany to the holy guardian spirits of the just (*Yashti* 13.49-52, 156-57). These righteous guardian spirits are spoken of as seeking praise, worship, and sustenance, and are invited to the place of offering, their blessings are sought, and the desire is expressed that they leave satisfied.⁵ This invocation is followed by a repetition of the same threefold recitation which preceded it (*a.v.* 3), thus encircling the selected Avestan recitation with the holy power of this special manthric prayer.

During the threefold recitation of the *manthra* praising righteousness (*a.v.* 3), the assistant priest takes the ladle in his right hand. With his left hand he picks up a piece of sandalwood, places it on the ladle, and makes a sandalwood offering to the fire. This is done three times, one for each recitation. He then stands up and shifts the ladle to his left hand. The chief priest picks up flower 1 with his right hand, holding it in his palm, then flower 2 between his thumb and forefinger and gives it to the assistant priest, who receives it with his right hand while standing in an attitude of respect (see Fig. 5).⁶ Holding the flower upright, he recites a manthric phrase praising Ahura Mazda, the radiant and glorious, and the chief priest joins him in the final phrase, declaring "I bless" (*afriami*). The chief priest also holds up his flower in a gesture of respect, and both priests recite an Avestan passage which invokes blessings on the ruler of the country.⁷

While reciting, the assistant priest touches the tip of the ladle held in his left hand to the underside of the south side of the fire-vase lid. Saying the concluding "Amen" phrase ("Thus may

5. For translations of these Avestan passages, see Boyce 1984:33, and Mandra 1983:116-17. For a rendering of the Pahlavi translation, see Dhabhar 1963:278-86.
6. The assistant priest stands holding the ladle tip under and touching his right elbow, a gesture of respect.
7. For a translation of these Avestan passages, see Bleck 1864:142, sts. 14-18. For a rendering of the Pahlavi translation of this passage, see Dhabhar 1963:274-75.

it be so") followed by "I bless" (*afriami*), the two priests exchange flowers in the following way. The chief priest touches his left hand to the flower tray (which, in turn, is touching the fire vase) and offers the assistant priest flower 1. The assistant takes the flower in his right palm and offers his own to the chief priest, who also receives it in the palm of his right hand. Holding the flowers, both priests recite the Avestan passage (*Yasna* 35.2) which speaks of the Zoroastrians' goal of incorporating good thoughts, words, and deeds into their lives.⁸ While reciting the opening phrases "with good thoughts, good words, good deeds," the chief priest picks up flowers 3, 4, and 5, gathering them between his thumb and first two fingers (while continuing to hold in his palm the earlier exchanged flower). He touches the bunched flowers to the vase of water, the sharbat, and the milk and wine glasses, and then places the three flowers in the assistant priest's open right hand, continuing to hold them there until they finish reciting the Avestan verse. The assistant priest shifts his standing position a little to the right and touches the end of the ladle to the northern underside of the fire-vase lid. Both priests recite *Yasna* 35.2 a second time, and the chief priest, keeping his left hand in contact with the tray, picks up the remaining three flowers (6, 7, 8) while again reciting "good thoughts, words, and deeds." After touching these flowers to the liquid offerings, he offers them to the assistant priest. The assistant priest now holds seven flowers in his right hand.

The assistant priest takes the ladle in his right hand (while still holding the flowers), moves a little to his left, and holds the ladle out in front of him so that the chief priest can grasp its broad-base tip. Taking hold of the base, the chief priest touches the ladle to the top of the vase of water as they both recite in an undertone a short Pazand prayer which praises the holy guardian spirits.⁹ This prayer is followed by a recitation of one *Ahunaوار manthra* (*a.v.* 1), during which the chief priest touches the ladle to the top of the vase of water four times, first to its east side, then south, west, and north; next, he touches the

8. For a translation of the Avesta, see Bleck 1864:95, sts. 4-6. For a rendering of the Pahlavi translation, see Dhabhar 1963:3-4.
9. For an explanation of Pazand recitations in undertone (*bisva*), see above, p. 162, in the description of the *Yasna*.

ladle to the tray and, last, to the fire-vase lid, holding it there until the *manthra* is concluded. These ritual gestures of contact (*paywand*) are repeated, only this time they both recite the *manthra* praising righteousness (*a.v.* 1) and the ladle tip is placed on the four corner directions of the water vase, i.e., northeast, southwest, southeast, and northwest, forming a crisscross pattern of movement.

At the conclusion of this *manthra*, the chief priest lifts his left hand from the tray, and the assistant priest places the ladle on the sandalwood tray and gives all seven flowers to the chief priest, who receives them with both hands cupped together, encloses them in folded hands, and makes a ritual salutation to the head. He places the consecrated flowers on the flower tray. With the assistant priest still standing, both recite two Ahunawar prayers (*a.v.* 2), dedications to the Lord of Wisdom and to all holy guardian spirits, and the *manthra* in praise of righteousness (*a.v.* 1).¹⁰ The protective power of these *manthras* again frames this portion of the ritual.

Reciting in undertone a Pazand passage which expresses the hope that the celebrants, and all whom they represent, may be united in strength and righteousness, the priests join in a ritual handshake. This is followed by an encircling recitation of the Avestan "Amen" and "I bless" passage, and a reiteration of Yasna 35.2. The assistant priest then sits down, marking the conclusion of the first of three Avestan selections.

F. SECOND AND THIRD SELECTIONS OF AVESTAN RECITATIONS

Since our example is an Afrinagan ceremony dedicated to all righteous guardian spirits, which is usually said in honor of the deceased, most often three Avestan selections are said: the first, as we have seen, is to the guardian spirits (*ardafrawash*); the second, to the coworkers (*dahman*) of the seven Bountiful Immortals; the third, to the spirit being Srosh, the pervasive presence of Wisdom's insight and the guardian spirit of the deceased.

10. The dedicatory formula to all holy guardian spirits (Ardafrawash) invokes Ahura Mazda, the radiant and glorious, the Bountiful Immortals, and the strong and powerful guardian spirits of the Mazda-worshippers who flourished before and during the time of Zoroaster. See Korwal and Boyd 1991:91-92.

The ritual sequence is as before, except that for these Avestan selections, the opening Pazand prefaces are said in an undertone, one in honor of the coworkers and, following the completion of that ritual cycle, another in honor of Srosh. Like-wise, the number of *manthras* differs in each section, as do the dedicatory formulas in honor of the coworkers and of Srosh.¹¹ Each cycle follows the exact sequence as before, including the recitation of framing *manthras*, the exchange of flowers, and the concluding ritual handshake between the priests. The Avestan selection for the coworkers is Yasna 60.2-7, which is a prayer of benediction. It asks that in this house there be triumph of obedience over disobedience, peace over discord, charity over miserliness, humility over arrogance, true speech over false speech, righteousness over wickedness, and that all may prosper. The Avestan selection for Srosh is Yasna 57.1-8, a litany praising Srosh as the first who worshipped the Bountiful Immortals and the first to chant the five Gathas, the sacred hymns revealed to Zoroaster.¹²

G. CONCLUDING BENEDICTIONS

Upon completion of the three ritual cycles dedicated to the guardian spirits, to the coworkers, and to Srosh, three Pazand benedictory prayers (*afrin*) are chanted in full voice by the chief priest. These serve as the concluding prayers for the entire three-part ceremony. The first seeks the benediction of all holy guardian spirits (*Afrin* of Ardafrawash). In this recitation, the priest affirms his unity with the religion, extols righteousness and abjures wickedness, and prays that the soul of the deceased be in the highest heaven, the abode of Ahura Mazda, the Bountiful Immortals, and other holy persons.

The second prayer asks for the benediction of the great personages of ancient times (*Afrin* of Buzorgan). This Pazand recitation declares that blessings are showered on the person who has ordered the ceremony, and blessings are sought so that this person may be as righteous and auspicious as the great ancient

11. The section in honor of Dahman (*Afrinagan* of Dahman) requires the recitation of two Ahunawar *manthras* (*a.v.* 2) and three prayers in praise of righteousness (*a.v.* 3). The *Afrinagan* of Srosh requires *a.v.* 5 and *a.v.* 3.

12. Yasna 57.1-8 also includes reference to the different types of barsom (bundles of pomegranate or tamarisk twigs) used in worship by Srosh.

ruler Kay Khosrow and other good kings and persons of Iran, in this way keeping alive the name and fame of Iran.

The final prayer is to the Bountiful Immortals (Afrin of Amahtraspand). All seven Bountiful Immortals, with their co-workers, are praised, and it is wished that all be united with them and their adversaries defeated. Ancient personages and fires of Iran are remembered, as well as the guardian spirit of Zoroaster. It is hoped that joy, delight, comfort, auspiciousness, prosperity, and goodness may come to the house, and that disease, sickness, discomfort, pain, and pestilence leave it.

During the last paragraph of the final prayer, the assistant priest joins in the recitation as the chief priest brings his hands together in ritual salutation. Both recite a concluding benediction praising those who have come to this ceremony or have participated in it:

For every step taken by you, the pious ones who have come to this celebration and who have been the participants in this celebration, may the resplendent House of Song (Caroithman) come forward [200 steps to meet (you)]. May merits increase for your arrival (here) and may sins be eradicated on your departure. May the terrestrial world be good and the spiritual world excellent. Finally, may righteousness increase and may the souls be fit for the House of Song. May you be righteous and may you live long.¹³

Thereafter both priests recite the final manthric invocations which frame the entire ceremony ("leave the *bay*")—*ya.u* 21, *a.u* 12—and conclude with a final unit of four prayers. The first wishes for health, glory, soundness of body, spiritual wealth, children with innate wisdom, long life, and the shining and blissful paradise of the next world. The second also wishes for abundant health; the third seeks help, courage, victory, and joy from Ahura Mazda. The fourth is a Pazand prayer seeking increase of merits and decrease of sins.¹⁴ This concludes the Afrinagan of Ardafrawash.

13. See Dhabhar 1963:414-15.

14. See also Korwal and Boyd 1991:89; Modi 1922:180; and Dhabhar 1963:17.

GLOSSARY OF ZOROASTRIAN TERMS

<i>afrin</i> :	as a general term, "blessing," "benediction"; also applied to specific Pazand prayers of blessing; a common ceremony of blessing which can be performed in any clean place by priests or qualified laity.
<i>Afrinagan (afrinagan)</i> :	the most ancient, sacred, and efficacious Zoroastrian <i>manthra</i> ; also called (from its beginning phrase) the <i>yatha ahii vairyô</i> prayer (abbr. <i>ya.u</i>).
<i>Ahura Mazda</i> :	the Lord of Wisdom; omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent God of the Zoroastrians.
<i>Amahtraspand</i> :	the Rahlavi term for the Bountiful Immortals (see Amesha Spenta).
<i>Amesha Spenta</i> :	beings created by Ahura Mazda: Righteousness, Health, Life, Dominion, Good Mind, and Devotion. Grouped together with Ahura Mazda, they number seven.
<i>Angra Mainyu</i> :	the hostile or evil spirit, the adversary of Ahura Mazda.
<i>Ardafrawash (ardāfrawash)</i> :	holy spirit beings worthy of worship, acting as guardians to the righteous.
<i>ashem vohu</i> :	one of the holiest prayers of the Zoroastrians which praises righteousness (abbr. <i>a.u</i>).

Avesta:	the name applied to the whole of the Zoroastrian scriptures or to individual sections of it.
Avestan:	the language in which the Avesta is written.
bay:	literally "utterance"; an antipho- nal Avestan recitation between the chief priest and the assis- tant priest; also, any spoken Avestan <i>manthra</i> which precedes, accompanies, or follows an ac- tion for the purpose of encircling that act with the power of holy speech.
barsom:	the bundle of metal wires (for- merly twigs) held or touched by the priest throughout the Yasna liturgy.
bista:	"with closed [lips]"; the mode of reciting inarticulately the Pazand texts encircled by Avestan recita- tion delivered in a normal voice (see <i>gushada</i>).
Bountiful Immortals: <i>Dahman (dahmān):</i>	see Amesha Spenta.
Dastur:	a man of authority, a Zoroastrian priest; in present usage, applied to a High Priest.
diabacha:	"preface"; the introductory recita- tion in Pazand that remembers the name of the spirit being to whom the ceremony is dedicated, the name of the persons, living or dead, in whose honor the service is held, and the name(s) of a living person(s) who has commissioned the service.
fravashi:	the guardian spirits of the souls of the living and the dead.

Carothman:	the highest heaven, the House of Song.
Gathas (gāthas):	the five sacred hymns of Zoro- aster preserved as part of the Yas- na (chapters 28-34 and 41-51, 53).
gētīg:	the visible, material world, distin- guished from the <i>menōg</i> .
gushada:	"with open [lips]"; i.e., articulated in a normal manner; refers to the Avestan recitation that follows a Pazand text recited nasally with closed lips (see <i>bista</i>).
hōm:	the name of the plant from which juice is extracted in the Yasna lit- urgy (Sanskrit: <i>soma</i>); also the name of the spirit being who pre- sides over the plant (Hom); and the name of the consecrated drink containing the <i>parāhom</i> mix- ture plus goat's milk.
jashan:	the congregational service of thanksgiving in which an Afrina- gan ceremony is performed by two or more priests on behalf of the assembly and a living or de- ceased Zoroastrian.
Kay Khosrow:	illustrious king of ancient Iran, of the Kayanian dynasty.
kusti:	the sacred cord worn around the waist by orthodox Zoroastrians; also refers to the ritual of untying and re-tying the sacred cord.
manthra:	inspired, sacred Avestan utter- ances.
menōg:	the invisible, spiritual world, dis- tinguished from the <i>gētīg</i> .
padayab:	the ritual ablution involving the washing of the face, hands, and feet while reciting an Avestan prayer.

pad-yab-kusti:

the ritual process of untying and re-tying the sacred cord worn around the waist, accompanied by a set formula of manthric recitations.

Pahlavi:

the Middle Persian language of the Sasanians, the last Zoroastrian dynasty to rule Iran.

Paragna (paragna):

the prefatory ceremony to the Yas-na liturgy.

pardhom:

the mixture of consecrated water, crushed *hom*, and pomegranate twigs prepared in the prefatory service to the Yasna and drunk by the chief priest in the Yasna proper.

paywand:

"connection"; the ritual contact between persons or things.

Pazand:

the Pahlavi language written in Avestan letters after Semitic elements are replaced with their Iranian equivalents.

Sashyant:

the future savior, born of a virgin mother, who will bring about the renovation of the world.

Srosh:

the spirit being acting as the guardian of one's soul for three days after death; through Srosh, the Lord of Wisdom's inspiration is heard; hence, the vehicle of insight, the revealer of the "religion."

yasht:

"worship," "praise"; a litany to the spirit beings (traditionally thirty-three in number).

Yasna:

"worship"; the name used both for a section of the Avestan texts and for the high liturgical service.

yazad:

"worthy of worship"; a spirit being worthy of worship who helps the righteous in their fight against evil.

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